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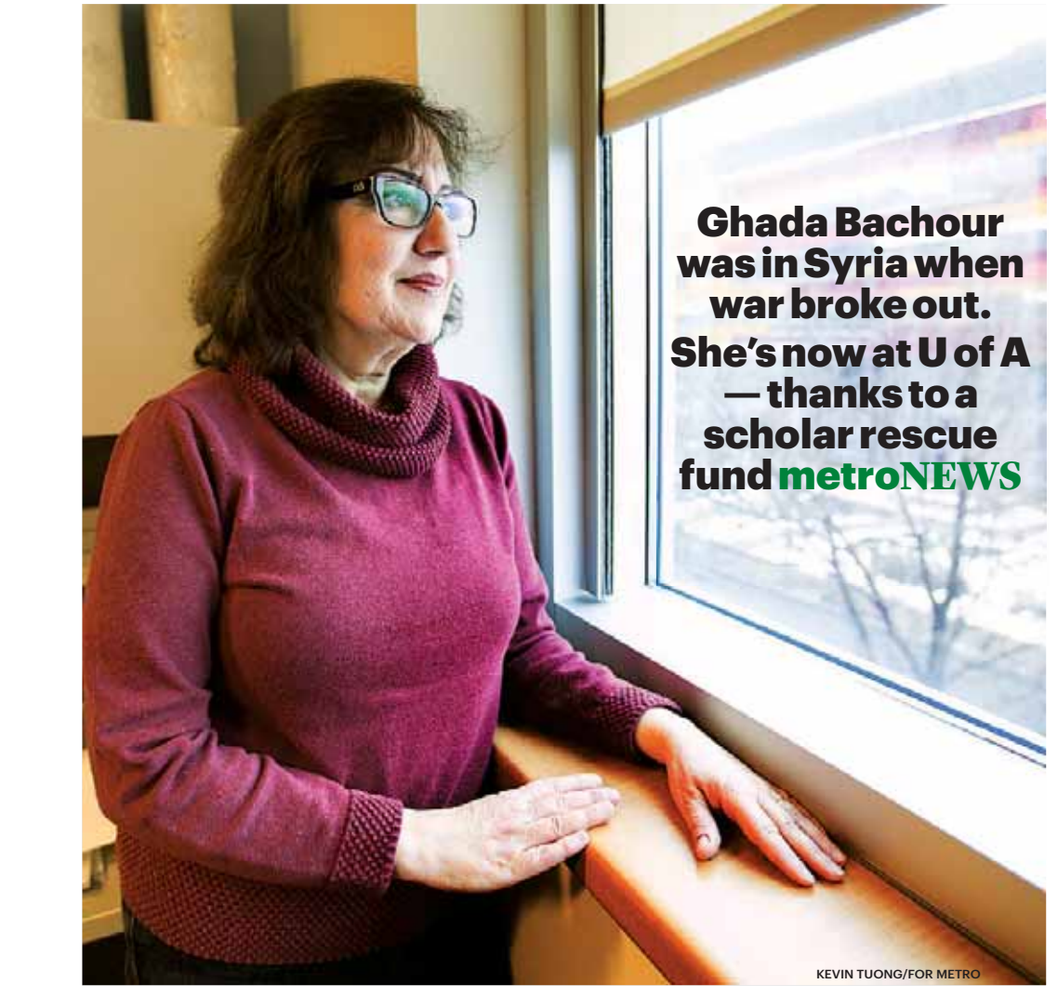

Ghada Bachour was in Syria when war broke out. She's now at U of A — thanks to a scholar rescue fund metroNEWS

KEVIN TUONG/FOR METRO

REFUGE FOUND

Troubled firm seeks solution

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Greys employees feeling trapped in dispute between city, company

Ryan Tumilty
Metro | Edmonton

A former employee of troubled firm Greys Paper Recycling told Metro he feels trapped in a battle between the company and the city, and just wants his job back.

In October, Greys missed a rent payment for its facility at the Edmonton Waste Management Centre by a deadline the city set. The city wanted the payment to be made with money from paper sales, but Greys was only able make the payment with new investor money.

Gary Abada, the company's former warehouse supervisor, said he left the company in mid-November, along with many other staff, because Greys was no longer paying his wages and there were simply too few staff to get the work done.

He said employees didn't know a lot about what was happening with the company through the summer, but work continued on changing the facility to improve its paper product's quality.

When the city's deadline came in October, he said they were shocked to find the city at the door.

"We were coming into work one day, and the city was there and the locks were being changed," he said.

He added a day later employees were allowed back to work after the company's lawyers and the city's lawyers talked.

The Greys recycling process uses 100 per cent post-consumer material to make new paper. The city initially heralded the company as an environmental leader. The city put $9.4 million into the company to help build the facility, but was not formally an investor and expected to be paid back through rent payments.

Abada said he believed Greys could have gotten its idea working — with more time.

He said the company was bringing in new machines to improve the quality of their paper to attract more clients.

"We just needed another four more months to buy the equipment and get it going," he said.

"I loved the whole concept and I worked there for less pay than at other companies, because I loved the whole idea."

In late October, Greys sought creditor protection.

City spokesperson John Pater said at the time the city is waiting to see how that process plays out, while also talking with the company through legal counsel.

Today, Abada said he wants the battle between the company and city to be resolved.

$9.4M

Amount the city has put into building the Greys Paper Recycling facility.

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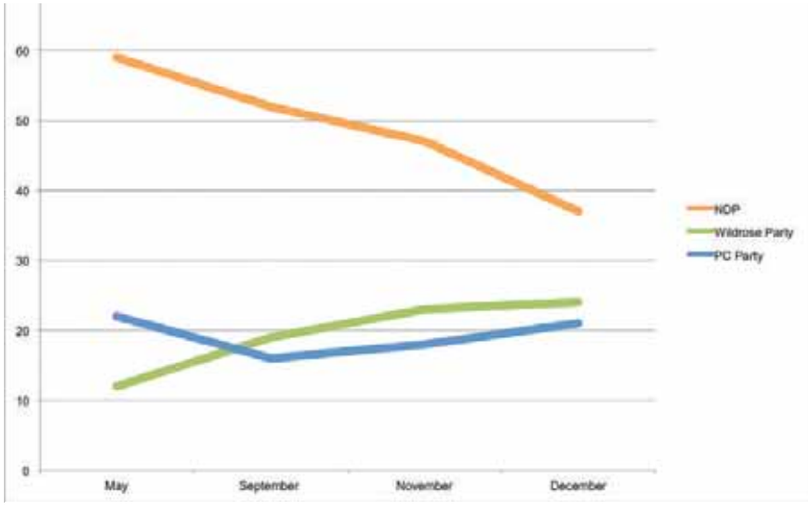
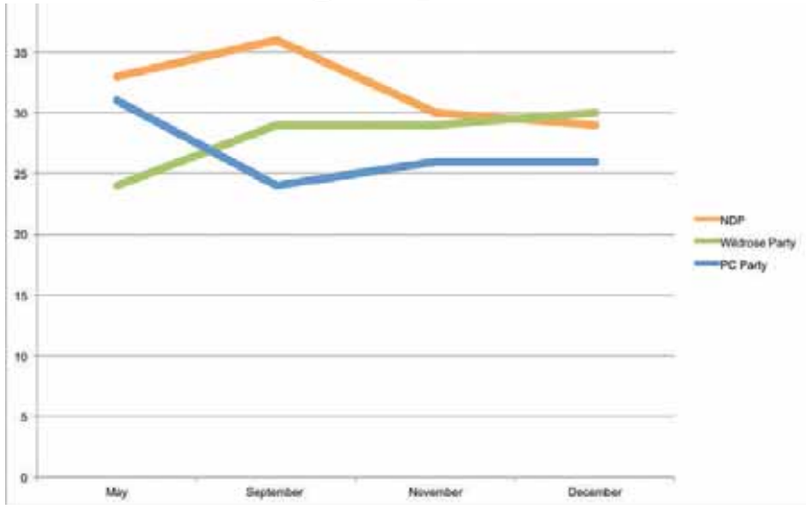
Edmonton CMA



While the NDP has seen a precipitous drop in the Edmonton area, in the city of Edmonton the drop isn't as dramatic, and the party still enjoys a healthy lead. THINKHQ

Calgary CMA



it's still a three-way race in Calgary, though the NDP's slight decline could have had a big impact on riding outcomes, says political science professor, Duane Bratt. THINKHQ

Economy batters NDP popularity

Darren Krause
Metro | Calgary

New poll numbers show support for Alberta's governing NDP is in a post-election tailspin, with the party losing ground to both Wildrose and the Progressive Conservatives — but the economy rather than recent policy could be to blame, experts say.

According to a ThinkHQ survey of 1, 230 Albertans, province-wide support among decided voters showed the Wildrose Party out front with 33 per cent, the NDP at 29 per cent and PC Alberta with 25 per cent. In fourth is the Alberta Liberal Party with eight per cent.

ThinkHQ president Marc Henry said the NDP retreat from an election high of 41 per cent mimics the wave of support that took them to a majority government.

"That waves receding and it's almost receding in the same fashion it went out," said Henry, noting that although the recent legislative session has been rocky, with controversial Bill 6 and the climate change proposal, the economy is likely a bigger factor in the downward pressure on popularity.

"People in Alberta are anxious about the economy. It's not as though people blame the government for the straits that we're in ... it's not their fault that oil's at $37 per barrel," Henry said.

Poll numbers also show a steep drop in the Edmonton CMA, which includes the bedroom cities around Edmonton, from a high of 59 per cent in May to 37 per cent today. Still, the NDP lead Wildrose by 13 per cent, with the latter registering support around 24 per cent.

"The erosion of their (NDP) support in Edmonton has been drastic, but they had such a huge lead, so they still own Edmonton."

In Calgary, it's a three-way dogfight, as it was leading up to the election.

NDP support has slipped to 29 per cent from an election high of 36 per cent, while Wildrose support rose slightly from 29 to 30 per cent. The PCs, meanwhile, rose from 24 per cent at election time to 26 per cent today.

Mount Royal political science professor Duane Bratt agreed the economy plays a large role in the poll numbers, but said the Calgary results show some of the city's seats would be in play for the Wildrose and PC parties.

"Those races were so tight," Bratt said.

"What this shows me is the (next) election will be won or lost in Calgary."

THE NUMBERS

The ThinkHQ online survey uses a representative but non-random sample, so margin of error isn't applicable. However, a probability sample of this size (1,230) yields a margin of error of +/- 2.8 per cent 19 times out of 20. THINKHQ

12

Percentage drop in support Premier Rachel Notley's party has seen since May.

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REFUGEE CRISIS

Researcher now has position at university

Alex Boyd
For Metro | Edmonton

After violence at the University of Aleppo, pharmaceutical researcher Ghada Bachour finds refuge at the University of Alberta.
KEVIN TUONG/FOR METRO

Ghada Bachour was sitting in the front row of the bus when it was stopped by a group of men with guns.

She was headed to the University of Aleppo, where she worked as a pharmaceutical sciences researcher, when men wearing black headbands boarded the bus and demanded everyone's identity cards.

They soon returned all the cards, except hers.

"They asked me to get off the bus and told me that, next time, I should sit in the last seat and wear a hijab," Bachour says, via email.

They also told her they'd come back and hurt her.

Today, Bachour tells the story from her new office at the University of Alberta, a world away from the men on the bus and the university where she taught for over 20 years.

She arrived in Edmonton in September thanks to help from the Scholar Rescue Fund, a program run by the U.S.-based Institute for International Education.

The University of Alberta agreed to jointly fund the program in 2013, and Bachour is the second academic to come to Edmonton through that funding.

Last year, Abdul Ghafoor Al-Shehabi, a researcher in aerospace engineering arrived in Edmonton from Aleppo.

Both are able to stay for a one-year term, with the option to renew for a second.

In recent years Aleppo, Syria's largest city, has become an increasingly violent frontier in the country's civil war. Bachour was on campus for the first day of exams in January 2013, when explosions next to the school's residences killed at least 82 people.

The University of Alberta helped both with immigration paperwork and finding a place to live. While their immigration status doesn't allow them to work as full professors, both are collaborating on research with local academics.

> **This is helping a colleague in need, and that is what colleagues do.**
> Britta Baron

"It wasn't hard to adapt to the university at all thanks the help of the university — especially the dean of the faculty and the head of the department," Bachour says. "They've created the best working conditions for me."

Britta Baron, vice-provost and associate vice-president (international), hopes the U of A will serve as an example to other Canadian universities. "There's a collegial responsibility to reach out to colleagues that are in such precarious situations, as these people are," she says.

"This is helping a colleague in need, and that is what colleagues do."

SAFETY

Province passes farm bill

One of the most turbulent Alberta legislature sittings in recent memory wrapped up Thursday with the passage of a contentious farm-safety bill.

The NDP government passed the bill in third reading by using its legislative prerogative to cut off debate.

House leader Brian Mason said there had been 20 hours of debate at the second reading alone and he suggested the opposition was just trying to stall.

Mason said the crux of the bill was to provide to farm workers basic rights that workers in other industries have.

"People have been dying on farms. People are injured on farms," Mason told the house.

"Those lives are worthwhile. Those lives are valuable.

"Those families who've lost loved ones or whose breadwinners can no longer earn a living, they deserve support."

Opposition parties fought hard against the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. They said it needed more consultation with those affected.

Farmers have held numerous protest rallies and convoys.

They say they weren't consulted enough and bureaucratic red tape will strangle the culture and profitability of family farms.

It has been, at times, an ugly, vicious debate, with cabinet ministers being heckled, berated, and sworn at during consultation meetings with farmers.

Energy Minister Marg McCuaig-Boyd, who is from a farm family, broke down in tears in the house recounting some of the hate and vitriol she has endured.

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ECONOMY

Bankruptcies surge in summer months

Ryan Tumilty
Metro | Edmonton

Bankruptcy and creditor protection filings in Alberta have jumped by 25 per cent over the same time frame last year, according to new numbers released by a national agency.

The numbers, released by the Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy Canada for July, August and September show 2,477 people either declared bankruptcy or sought creditor protection in the province.

While that number is only slightly increased from the first three months of this year, it's much higher than the 1,969 people who declared bankruptcy during the same three months in 2014.

Gary Howitt, with Edmonton bankruptcy firm Exelby and Partners, said he is definitely seeing more people in his office.

"Our business has gone up for sure, and I am sure all the trustees are (busier)," he said.

Howitt said it's not hard to understand why so many people are running into trouble, with the energy industry in dire straits due to the low price of oil.

"I am seeing in towns like Fort Mac, they're laying off a thousand people at a time," he said.

Many of those layoffs happened earlier in the year and Howitt said he's concerned about what's next for the economy, because many of those workers may be running out of time.

"Some of the people get severance packages and things like that and I have a hunch we are in for a busier time when those severance packages start to run out," he said.

Howitt has been working as a trustee for more than 20 years and said at least this time there are other major construction projects underway, "so at least people have an alternative."

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Edmonton housing bucked trends in 2015 in Alberta, but experts say that will change in 2016. KEVIN TUONG/FOR METRO

Price drop forecast

REAL ESTATE

Edmonton can't escape economic factors

Tim Querengesser
Metro | Edmonton

Both the price of a house and a square foot of office space will fall in 2016 in Edmonton, experts say, as the city begins to be dragged down by the forces that have weakened prices elsewhere in Alberta.

"Edmonton has bucked the trend, positively, compared to Calgary," said Elton Ash of Remax Western Canada, after the release of the company's annual residential house price report Thursday.

Ash said Edmonton's house prices increased by 2.5 per cent in 2015, an anomaly compared with other Albertan cities.

The cause, he said, is Edmonton's booming construction industry, which is acting as a buffer for the job losses the city has experienced in the oil and gas sector.

"But, if we look at 2016, it isn't quite as rosy. We're going to see a price reduction of 3.5 per cent."

The part of Edmonton's boom that has protected residential housing prices — office construction — is about to soften other real estate prices, experts say.

David Young, a managing director with CBRE, a commercial real estate firm, said about 1.8 million square feet of new office space will hit the market over the next two years.

Young said Edmonton's office space supply is small compared to most cities, with about 15 million square feet currently available. But he says the market only "absorbs" about 110,000 square feet of new space a year.

"Economics 101 says the [office space] market will be softer," Young said.

Still, "We needed the new buildings," Young said. "We did not have any significant construction for 20-plus years. But it's going to leave a significant amount of 'backspace' in the towers where these tenants are vacating."

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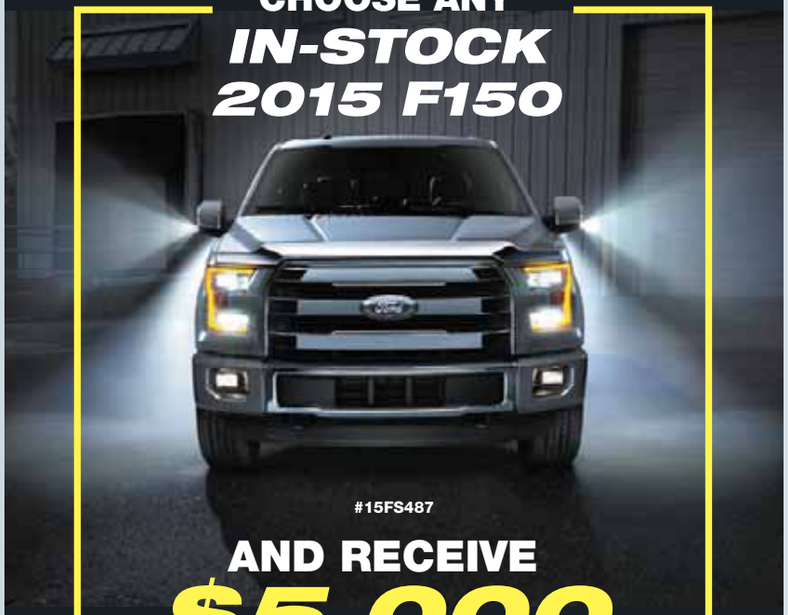

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Transportation Minister Brian Mason and distracted driving advocate Renaye Wade (right) at **an announcement of new demerits Thursday.** RYAN TUMILTY/METRO

Distracted driving rules announced

ROAD SAFETY

Minister hints at excessive speeding penalties

Ryan Tumilty
Metro | Edmonton

Transportation minister Brian Mason announced new penalties for distracted driving Thursday and added the government soon plans to look ways to crack down on excessive speeders as well.

At a press conference Thursday, announcing the addition of three demerit points to the current $287 fine for distracted driving, Mason said the government is also looking at what to do about drivers caught traveling well beyond the speed limit.

"We've seen a couple of cases of very high-speed vehicle operating in school zones, so it is clear to me we need to provide the appropriate response," he said.

In addition to lobbying for the distracted driving changes, Edmonton Police Chief Rod Knecht has pushed for police to be given the ability to seize vehicles if they catch drivers traveling in excess of 50 km/h over the posted speed limit.

Mason said he has met with the chief on the issue and heard his argument.

"We will wait and see … but I certainly think the chief has made a compelling case," he said.

He also said he isn't clear what the government will do yet, but confirmed it's a priority.

"There was no room left on the legislative agenda of the fall session, so we are looking to have decisions to be able to consider legislation in the spring," he said.

Distracted driving advocates welcomed Mason's decision Thursday, including Reyane Wade who was in a coma for 34 days and left with a serious brain injury after a collision in 2013.

She said drivers need to pay attention to the road and think about the danger of not paying attention.

"This is something that me and my family will deal with for the rest of my life. This was not an accident. This was a car crash. This was preventable. It is a choice not to pay attention."

> **We've seen a couple of cases of very high-speed vehicle operating in school zones, so it is clear to me we need to provide the appropriate response.**
> Brian Mason

RIDE SHARING

Uber stands behind insurance coverage

Despite repeated concerns about its insurance coverage, Uber said this week it has a company policy that's been tested multiple times throughout Edmonton.

The company's Alberta general manager, Ramit Kar, said the company has a contingent policy with AIG Insurance to cover its drivers — if the driver's own policy will not cover a claim in the event of an accident while driving for Uber.

"We do over a million rides a month in Canada, and in every single instance it has worked the way it is supposed to," Kar said. "Our insurance has worked the way it was intended to every single time."

The Insurance Bureau of Canada and several taxi advocates have questioned whether Uber drivers are covered if they are working for the company.

Kar explained that when incidents happen, the first line of insurance is the driver's policy, but the company's is there as a backup. "It would go through the driver's policy first and then it goes through ours."

Still, despite offering new details about Uber's insurance arrangements, Kar would not release details on the number of incidents in Edmonton or Canada. He said the company is also optimistic about a city bylaw, set to return to council in the new year.

Councillors passed second reading of the bylaw in November, but asked for more work from city staff before giving the bylaw third and final reading.

Kar said the fees for Uber drivers the city proposed would have been far too high to make the service economical, but he's optimistic that will change.

RYAN TUMILTY/METRO

One of the main issues many have with Uber is with its insurance coverage. METRO FILE

HEALTH

Germs aren't joyful: AHS

The Christmas season is an "optimal time" for germs to be spread, says Dr. Joanna Oda, a medical health officer in Edmonton.

As the holiday approaches, Dr. Oda and other Albertan health officials are worried too few people have rolled up their sleeves for a free flu shot.

Dr. Gerry Predy, senior medical officer of health, says so far this season more than 950,000 doses of flu vaccine have been administered. He says that's a good start, but thousands of people remain without protection.

As of last Saturday, the province has reported 66 cases of influenza, including 19 people who had to be hospitalized. The Alberta government hopes 40 per cent of people eligible for the shot will get immunized. Last year, 101 people died in the province of flu-related causes.

"We're encouraging people to spread 'joy not germs'," says Dr. Oda. "It's important for people to get immunized and protect themselves and their families against influenza."

TRINA MOYLES/FOR METRO — WITH FILES FROM THE CANADIAN PRESS

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What started as an ember of an idea has grown tremendously over the years, creative director Carmen Salerno said. SHAW

Famous fire log is still burning bright

POP CULTURE

The identity of the fire-starter still top secret after 30 years

Andrea Ross
Metro | Edmonton

A few things have changed since a mysterious, flannel-sleeved arm first stoked the embers of the Shaw fire log almost three decades ago.

High-definition production has made the flames a little brighter and the crackle of the burning wood a touch crisper. The log is now on social media, with more than 12,000 followers on Twitter. Around 9,000 people have downloaded a smartphone app to watch its flames on the go.

But the identity of the man with the flannel shirt — the same man whose arm viewers have watched tend the fire for 30 years — remains a mystery.

"We can't say, that's a closely guarded secret," Shaw creative director Carmen Salerno said. "He's just a very humble individual. He knows he has a very important task and he sort of shies away from the camera.

"He's just incredibly adept at starting a fire."

> **I guess when you find something you love, why would you want to replace it?**
> Carmen Salerno

The cable company's annual Christmas tradition was first sparked in Edmonton in 1986 as a way of filling airtime when staff left for the holidays.

Today, the beloved televised fire still warms the living rooms of millions of Canadians.

Last year, Shaw decided to record a new fire for the first time in about 10 years. The location was a quaint cabin in North Vancouver, which featured a 100 year-old fireplace with floor to ceiling stone.

"We saw it and thought, 'this, honestly, is perfect,'" Salerno said.

The burning log concept hasn't changed since its beginnings in an Edmonton fireplace, and Salerno said he expects the new footage to be used for years to come. But next time they film a new fire, it'll be the same, unnamed man ensuring its flames don't fizzle out.

"He's a bit of a woodsman, he just loves the outdoors and it's something he wants to continue to do," Salerno said.

LOG GETS BLOG

New technology brings fire log into the future

The Shaw fire log has moved out of Canadians' living rooms and onto computer screens. It's become a hit on Twitter, where the log tweets puns and fire jokes aplenty.

"I decided to try #crossfit this year. I could really feel the burn," it tweeted on Dec. 10.

"If I said anything inappropriate last night, it was an axedent. I was hacked," the account tweeted on Dec. 5.

The log's app, launched last year, lets users rub smoke from their screens and clear embers from the fire. It's come a long way from an Edmonton fireplace 30 years ago, Salerno said.

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HUDSON'S BAY

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Youth delegate disappointed

COP21

Climate agreement too watered down, activist says

Trina Moyles
for Metro | Edmonton

A photo of the Canadian Youth Delegation in Paris. CONTRIBUTED/DIANE CONNORS

It's been two weeks of long days and nights for 26-year-old Diane Connors, an Edmonton youth activist who's at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris (COP21).

But, as world leaders draw closer to signing a universal agreement on climate change, things are only heating up, she says.

"We're definitely feeling the pressure. Tensions are on high right now," says Connors.

Connors is a member of the Canadian Youth Delegation, a team of 17 youth from across the country who were selected earlier this year to represent Canadian youth at the COP21 negotiations.

After two weeks in Paris, Connors and her colleagues are eager to see how COP21 play out — it's predicted that world leaders will sign the final agreement by Saturday.

But Connors is already feeling skeptical of the outcome.

"We've already had disappointments," she says. "There's been a lot of the human rights language taken out of the text."

The majority of world leaders refused to acknowledge indigenous rights in the agreement, she says.

She's also frustrated with Canada's recent move to axe a policy that would have wealthier Western countries help compensate the financial losses of countries that suffer the consequences of extreme climate change.

> **What steps will the government take to achieve 1.5 C? We want to see a plan.**
> Diane Connors

"We need to take responsibility for more vulnerable countries," says Connors. "Some of these places are having difficulty with just surviving from climate change."

What Canada has gotten right, she says, is its recent push for to limit climate warming to 1.5 C in the agreement.

"But how will we get there? What steps will the government take to achieve 1.5 C? We want to see a plan."

"After all, we're the generation that's going to be around by 2050."

REDWATER

Fatal injury at work site

A 59-year-old man died in hospital Wednesday after being hit by a bus on a work site in Redwater.

The incident happened just after 6:30 a.m. on Dec. 9, when a coach bus dropped off workers at the Redwater Sturgeon County refinery site. The bus was making a left turn when it struck the worker, who was crossing the road. He was caught underneath the vehicle when the driver stopped.

The man was transported to the University of Alberta hospital, where he passed away.

Occupational Health and Safety confirmed Thursday they are investigating the incident. METRO

WHERE?

Redwater is about 52 kilometres north of Edmonton.

Alberta delays release of results

OIL ROYALTY REVIEW

Premier says more time needed to get response right

Premier Rachel Notley THE CANADIAN PRESS

Alberta's highly anticipated review of its energy royalty regime has been delayed until the new year.

Premier Rachel Notley had promised that a panel report on the issue and the government's response to that report would be out by the end of December.

But Notley said Thursday her government wants to take more time to make sure it gets its response right.

"The delay is relatively small because we know that people are looking for the outcome sooner rather than later," Notley told a news conference.

"We are committed to delivering it as soon as we can, but we want to be sure that we get it right, that we don't kick something out the door that's not ready. My hope is that we will be able to announce to Albertans our plans going forward in early January."

A panel headed by ATB Financial president Dave Mowat is reviewing aspects of the royalty regime to determine, among other things, whether Albertans are getting a fair share of the profits.

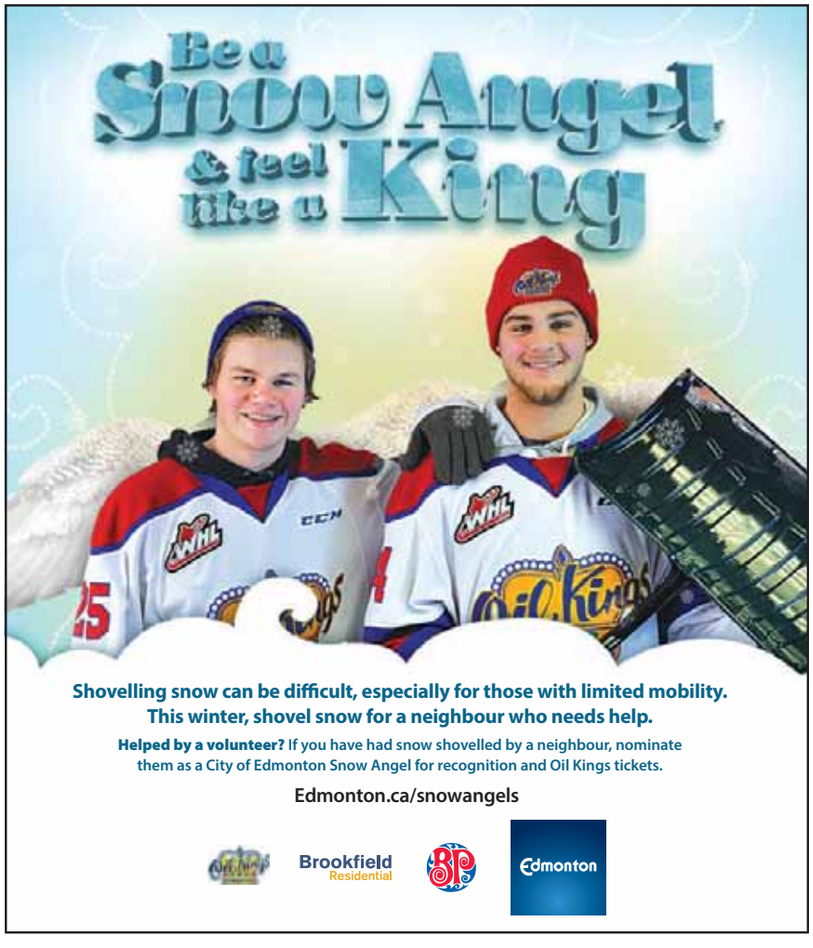
It fulfils a promise made by Notley during the NDP's successful election campaign in May.

But the review has brought a heightened unease to an oil-patch sector grappling with thousands of layoffs due to the worldwide plunge in oil prices.

The benchmark West Texas Intermediate price for oil has dropped to $40 US a barrel from $100 a barrel in mid-2014, taking with it the lion's share of provincial revenues.

Alberta is set to run a $6.1-billion deficit this year.

THE CANADIAN PRESS



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KEVIN TUONG/FOR METRO

Come 're-winterize' with brunch, blades

PARKS AND RECREATION

River Valley will soon have a 'ski chalet' atmosphere

Trina Moyles
For Metro | Edmonton

On Saturday, Edmonton's River Valley takes another step toward becoming what some hope is a place that, even in the dead of winter, is full of life.

Local chef Brad Lazarenko of Culina restaurant is launching Winter Weekend Brunch and dishing out the breakfast classics at the Dogwood Café in Victoria Park, located in the heart of the city's river valley.

That means for the first time ever, Edmontonians will be able to ski, skate, snowshoe and indulge in eggs benedict and huevos rancheros – all in the same place. Lazarenko is excited for what's on the menu and hopes to attract people out enjoying the river valley.

"We want people to take off their skis and skates, and come in for brunch – just like a ski chalet," he said.

He'll be serving up different specials every weekend: French toast, waffles and even Ukrainian perogies and kielbasa with fried eggs.

Lazarenko's Nordic brunch is part of the Edmonton's Winter City strategy to develop more winter recreational opportunities along the North Saskatchewan River.

> **I'm excited that we're starting to invest in the river.**
> Coun. Ben Henderson

"Over the past four years, we've been working to build cross-country ski trails and, of course, the new skating pavilion in Victoria Park,"said Coun. Ben Henderson.

Coun. Scott McKeen said he hopes Lazarenko's "high caliber food" will help to reconnect Edmontonians with the river valley during the coldest months of the year. "It's about 're-winterizing' Edmontonians," he said.

ALERT

Man charged with sex tourism after meeting underage girl

Jashua Robert Tremblay.
SUPPLIED/ALERT

Andrea Ross
Metro | Edmonton

A Fort McMurray man has been charged with sex tourism after allegedly travelling to Ireland twice to have sex with a 13-year-old girl he met online.

The Alberta Law Enforcement Response Team began investigating last year, when Ireland's police force alerted the RCMP. Irish police first became aware of the offences in 2013, when the victim was 13 years old.

Once ALERT was able to identify the suspect, he was formally charged on Dec. 9.

Jashua Robert Tremblay, 33, is charged with two counts of sexual interference, luring and child sex tourism.

Tremblay was not previously known to police.

"He had no record, and no major issues as far as police were concerned," Staff Sgt. Paul Czerwonka said.

Czerwonka said Tremblay was aware of the girl's age before meeting her.

> **The relationship developed, and I guess through conversation (Tremblay) found out she was residing in Ireland.**
> Staff Sgt. Paul Czerwonka

"There is no indication she had lied about her age," he said.

"The relationship developed, and I guess through conversation he found out she was residing in Ireland."

This is the first time ALERT has laid child sex tourism charges, which were added to the Canadian Criminal Code in 1997.

The code dictates Canadians citizens and permanent residents can be prosecuted for sexual offences committed against children in other countries.

CONTACT

ALERT said they do not believe any Albertan children were victimized, but encourage anyone with information about this case or other instances of child exploitation to contact them.

You can visit the ALERT website at www.alert-ab.ca, or call Crime Stoppers at 780-421-1122.

POLITICS

Leader not set to forgive

Alberta Wildrose Leader Brian Jean says there is still no forgiving or forgetting when it comes to Danielle Smith, the former leader who gutted the caucus a year ago by leading a mass floor-crossing.

"It's just not time right now. There was a tremendous breach of loyalty and trust that happened last year," Jean told reporters Thursday. "There are a lot of members that are not prepared to let bygones be bygones at this stage."

Smith is now a radio talk-show host on CHQR in Calgary.

Earlier Thursday, the CHQR morning-show host asked Jean why he and his caucus members refuse to appear as guests on Smith's afternoon show.

"Danielle who?" Jean replied.

Jean was asked later in the legislature news conference if it was a personal issue for him.

"It is personal," he replied.

"It's personally a long way to Calgary to drive to talk to Danielle Smith about something I would be happy to talk to any other reporter (about)."

Smith responded on air.

"I think (the Wildrose) are hurting themselves by not using this forum to be able to speak directly to you about their issues," she told her listeners.

Of the Jean snub she said: "I'm not going to hold it against him. The door is wide open."

Smith made national headlines a year ago when she led eight of her Official Opposition Wildrose caucus members over to then-premier Jim Prentice and his Progressive Conservative government.

Smith billed it as a reuniting of kindred conservative spirits necessary to keep the NDP from power, but voters didn't see it that way. THE CANADIAN PRESS

One charged over graffiti at Calgary train station

VANDALISM

Man believed to be his accomplice is in custody

A man believed to be responsible for writing hate-motivated profanities against Syrians and Muslims on the wall of the Tuscany CTrain station last week has been charged, while a second man police believe to be his accomplice is in custody.

On Thursday, Dec. 3, at about 5:45 p.m., two men entered the Tuscany CTrain Station.

Once inside, the men applied gold spray paint to four locations on both the upper and lower platforms of the station. A walkway ramp leading from the parking lot to the upper-level platform and a southbound CTrain were also tagged.

A photo from the Tuscany station appeared on Twitter along with several others.

One image from the station depicted the escalator, which had been sprayed in gold paint, with the misspelled words: "F--K Syrea, Kill Musilums."

In addition to the damage within the station, five vehicles in the south parking lot of the Tuscany station were found to have graffiti messages spray painted on them.

All of the graffiti messages were of anti-Syrian and anti-refugee sentiment and the Calgary Police Service has classified this as a hate-motivated crime.

Following an investigation, with assistance from Calgary Transit, Miguel Lavergene, 30, of no fixed address, has been charged with six counts of public mischief.

The Crown has yet to determine if hate charges are applicable in this case.

Lavergene is scheduled to appear in court on Monday, Jan. 25, 2016.

A second suspect has been arrested and will also face charges of six counts of public mischief. His name will be released once he has seen a Justice of the Peace and the charges have been confirmed.

The Calgary Police Service would like to thank the public and the media for their assistance. METRO STAFF

These two men are believed to be responsible for the graffiti at a Calgary CTrain station. COURTESY CALGARY POLICE SERVICE

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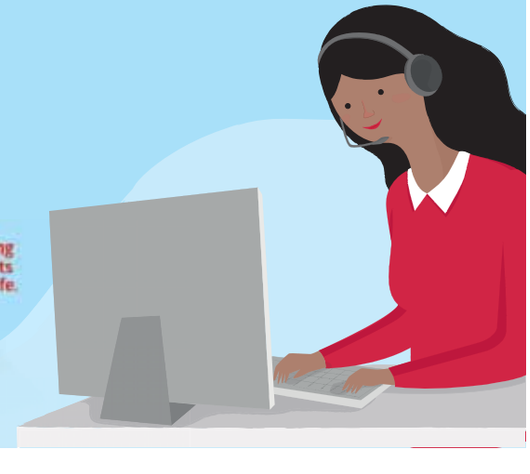

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Candy Cane Lane, an Edmonton institution, is lighting up the night this weekend. SUPPLIED/IHEARTEDMONTON

Enjoy holiday treats and holiday streets

EVENTS

The city's most interesting person shares weekend plans

HOW TO DOUGLAS
Douglas Dollars

FRIDAY:

An Edmonton winter tradition, Candy Cane Lane, opens its neighbourhood full of decorated houses in the area of 9915 148 Street to the public tonight between 5 p.m. and 10 p.m.. This makes for a cute date event, so be careful about who you take with you. Romance is in the air and donations to the Edmonton Food Bank should come with you.

At 8 p.m. The Clever Rabbit Vegetarian Café at 10724 124 Street is home to Christmas Disco, an interesting collection of some of Edmonton's coolest bands in both a format and venue that you won't see every day.

Power Buddies, Racket, and Gender Poutine are doing something similar at Cha Island, a tea shop, at 10332 81 Avenue. Hosting fun shows in unusual places is a thing Edmonton is doing very well.

Downtown returns to its dance dominance at 9 p.m. Bohemia (10217 97 Street) brings us a night of new wave and electronic dance, with Uncle Outrage, Cygnets, Boosh!, and MoonMuseum, and Evolution Wonderlounge (10220 103 Street) brings the grumpiest burlesque in town with the Queer Cabaret's BAH HUMBUG!

SATURDAY:

From 11 a.m. - 4 p.m, the Cash Mob returns to 124 Street (10715 124 Street), turning another meet-up into a community event bringing relief to struggling local businesses.

At noon, the holiday classic A Christmas Story plays at the Metro Cinema, and is sure to warm the heart.

The 100 Mile House and the AwesomeHots Annual Christmas Shindig kick off a free event for the Edmonton Food Bank at 4 p.m. at the Empress Ale House (9912 82 Avenue) with their unique knack for frontier music and tall tales. When the show ends, head to the Dovetail Delicatessen at 10721 124 Street for a rare occurrence, a Sailin' On pop-up, where you can try some new items for the upcoming year.

SUNDAY:

Two events fill the day to warm your heart. Between noon and 4 p.m. the Mutant Conservatory is holding Snowflake Sunday, a chance to bring the family or your someone sweet to an afternoon of making snowflakes, planting Christmas cacti and checking out some holiday scenes in the big pyramid.

If you're looking to have a bigger effect on your community, Barber Ha (at 10011 82 Avenue) is working to sponsor and support a Syrian family for a year, with Barbering for Syrian Refugees. Show up at the shop between noon and six, get your hair cut, buy some baked goods or other limited-edition merchandise and all the money goes toward refugee sponsorship.

THE INTERVIEW

Support newcomers with a stylish cut

I was able to talk some more with Linda Ha, proprietor of Barber Ha, a shop well-known for aiding social causes, about her shop's project, Barbering for Syrian Refugees.

Douglas: You've given great support to other causes in the past, what made this one the one to take up?

Linda Ha: Simply put, humanity. I truly feel that no one should have to go through the experience of war. Also my family are refugees from Vietnam. Without sponsorship we wouldn't be here today. Canada gave my family opportunities that they wouldn't have had otherwise.

Douglas: Canada has welcomed us all. If people can't make it out on Sunday, any other suggestions on how they can support sponsorship?

Linda: If people are unable to make it, they can donate online through CanadaHelps.org or donate their time and talents at HouseofWelcomesJ3.com.

DOUGLAS DOLLARS/FOR METRO

Super-hip Barber Ha is helping raise money for Syrian refugees — and all you need to do is get your 'do cut on Sunday.
CONTRIBUTED/JENN CREBAS PHOTOGRAPHY

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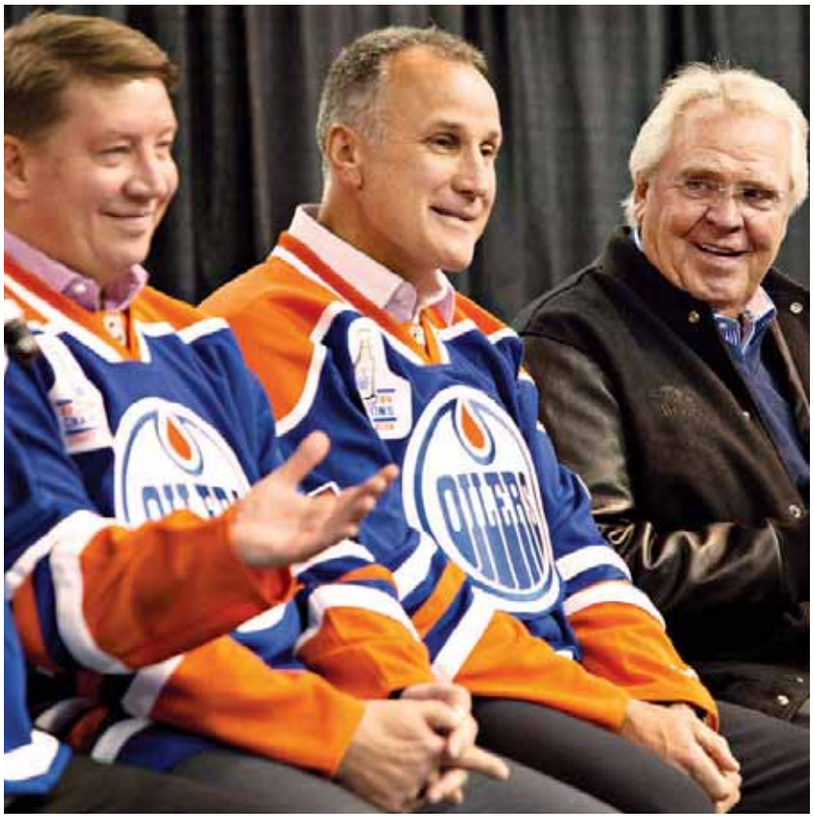

Jari Kurri, left, Paul Coffey and Glen Sather listen to teammates tells stories during last year's 1984 Stanley Cup reunion. JASON FRANSON/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Slats gets his due on banner night

NHL

Sather to be honoured for many years of Oilers success

Glen Sather wore the Oilers' sweater in the WHA, coached the NHL's greatest dynasty and managed in Edmonton for two decades. Now he'll finally have a banner to commemorate his hockey legacy in Alberta's capital.

Fifteen years after Sather left the organization, the Oilers will raise his banner to the rafters at Rexall Place on Friday night, alongside the numbers of Wayne Gretzky, Mark Messier, Jari Kurri, Paul Coffey, Glenn Anderson, Grant Fuhr, Al Hamilton and those celebrating five Stanley Cups and many more division and conference titles.

"I think the best thing I could say is if you asked those greats, those players, about Glen having his banner raised, they'll say that he warrants that as much as they do," former Oilers defenceman and current team president Kevin Lowe said last month in Toronto. "You can't say anything better than that."

Sather coached the Oilers during their transition from the WHA to the NHL and led them to the Cup final five times, winning it in 1984, 1985, 1987 and 1988. He ceded the bench to John Muckler after the 1988-89 season but still has as president and general manager for the Oilers' 1990 title.

"Slats was the straw that stirred the drink that got us all together and on the same path, and that's what's so special about him," Anderson said on a conference call. "Glen Sather was kind of the staple that put us all together and did everything that we needed to do to be successful."

During his coaching tenure, Sather coached immense talent better than almost anyone in the history of the sport. Throw Toe Blake, Al Arbour, Scotty Bowman and perhaps now even Joel Quenneville into that discussion.

> **Slats was the straw that stirred the drink.**
> Glenn Anderson

Acquiring the likes of Gretzky and Messier was only half the battle. The 1997 Hockey Hall of Fame inductee had to manage egos and make such a talented group worth together.

"He was great at allowing Wayne to have three-minute shifts so he could score 200-hundred-how-ever-many-points he did," Lowe said. "And he allowed Mess to develop into what he was and Coff and Fuhrsie and all those great players. He had the vision of the style of play and that's all well-documented."

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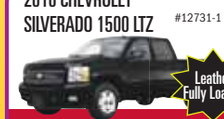
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Mazan Khabbaz, centre, a refugee from Syria, is embraced by a well-wisher as he arrives with his family at Toronto's Pearson Airport. CHRIS YOUNG/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Syrians welcomed after long journey

IMMIGRATION

Government works with sponsors to help 25,000

With suitcases stacked on luggage carts and blue bags full of info from government agencies on top, 163 Syrians lined up at the Beirut airport Thursday to begin the long journey to Canada.

They boarded a military plane as the vanguard of 25,000 refugees the Liberal government wants to bring to Canada by the end of February.

Photos taken by the Canadian Forces at the airport point showed a mix of men and women, teens and young children, some being offered teddy bears by Canadian officials.

The flight left Beirut to travel to Germany, where the military Airbus was to stop for refuelling and a change of crew before heading on to Toronto.

All of the Syrians on board Thursday are being sponsored by private groups, many of whom had filed the paperwork months ago in order to bring in some of the estimated 4.3 million Syrians displaced by the ongoing civil war in that country.

But the sponsors will have to wait a while longer before they personally greet the new arrivals.

The first Canadians the Syrians will meet upon landing at Toronto's Pearson airport will range from, perhaps, the prime minister, to a team of civil servants and border officers who will complete the final pieces of paperwork required.

From there, 116 will head to new homes in the Toronto area. Another four will go to Windsor, Ont. Sponsors in Kelowna, B.C., will welcome four, three will go to Coquitlam, B.C., and one to New Westminster, B.C. Twenty are bound for Calgary and the final 15 to Edmonton, according to statistics released by the Immigration department.

A second flight is set to arrive in Montreal on Saturday.

"We have great hopes for the success of this group of people that are arriving and their families as they build their new home here in Canada," said Arif Virani, the parliamentary secretary to the minister of immigration. THE CANADIAN PRESS

> **We have great hopes for the success of this group of people that are arriving and their families as they build their new (homes).**
> Arif Virani

WORLD VISION

Kids greet refugees in warm video

"Welcome to Canada!"

That's the message Canadian children are sending Syrian refugees coming into the country this week in a heartwarming video released by World Vision.

"There's something so overwhelming and touching in seeing how kids respond to the idea of people being forced to flee their country," said Hugh Brewster, national manager for Canadian programs at World Vision.

In several languages — including French, Spanish, Arabic and others — the children welcome refugees their own age with messages of friendship and advice for life in their newfound, Canadian home.

"Everyone likes Canada because we have all four seasons," adds one boy, posing in front of a hockey net.

"I want to be your best friends," one young girl says. "See you in school," says another.

The welcome messages were collected via email and World Vision put the video together in two days, Brewster told the Star.

He said many children expressed that they felt their job was "to make them feel welcome, to ask how you can help, to sit next to them in the cafeteria, to invite them on the slide with you."

"Kids can really teach us a lot about what it means to really open our hearts to new people," he said. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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NOBEL PRIZE NATIONAL TREASURE The 2015 Nobel physics laureate professor Arthur B. McDonald (left) of Canada receives his award from King Carl Gustaf of Sweden during the 2015 Nobel prize award ceremony in Stockholm Concert Hall on December 10.

AFP/TT NEWS AGENCY/JONAS EKSTROMER/SWEDEN OUTJONAS EKSTROMER/GETTY IMAGE

Cross-country child-care costs

FAMILY SERVICES

Toronto parents pay the most, Quebec the least: Report

A new report says child-care costs have increased across the country, but some regions are feeling the pinch much more than most.

The study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives tracks the price of child care across 27 Canadian cities and three age groups — infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

Child-care fees were highest in Toronto across the board, with parents facing median costs of more than a thousand dollars regardless of what age group their children fall in. Quebec marks the other end of the spectrum, where government policies have capped child-care fees and set the median cost at $174 a month across all age groups.

The study also found that space in regulated child-care facilities was hard to come by in every city and lengthy waiting lists were common.

The report by the CCPA — a think-tank that describes itself as a "progressive voice" in public policy debates — says the numbers suggest the need for all levels of government to get involved and invest in a more affordable child-care system nationwide.

Senior economist and report co-author David Macdonald said the variation among regions is both striking and concerning.

> **"It's very much an accident of birth as to whether they can find affordable child care or not.**
> David Macdonald

"It's very much an accident of birth as to whether they can find affordable child care or not," Macdonald said in a telephone interview. "One of the starkest differences is in Ottawa ... You pay five times more for the same pre-school space one kilometre away in Gatineau compared to in Ottawa." Cost variations are not always so starkly illustrated, but the centre's report suggests that fees cover a broad spectrum across the country.

Median costs for infant care in Toronto, which equal $1,736 a month, are noticeably higher than they are in second-place Newfoundland and Labrador which still charges a hefty $1,400.

Variations also exist among cities that place limits on the prices parents must pay. Quebec is not alone in capping child-care costs for families, as similar measures exist in Manitoba and Prince Edward Island.

"It's a labour-intensive industry," Mercer said. "We can't automate it and reap those efficiencies. That is at the heart of the whole problem."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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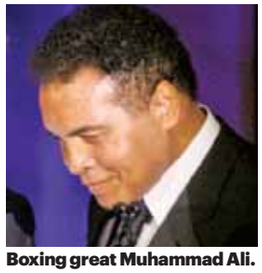
RESPONSE

Muhammad Ali backs Islam

Boxing legend Muhammad Ali criticized Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump's proposal to ban Muslims from entering the United States, calling on Muslims "to stand up to those who use Islam to advance their own personal agenda."

Ali, one of the most famous Muslims in the world, issued a statement saying, "True Muslims know that the ruthless violence of so-called Islamic Jihadists goes against the very tenets of our religion."

He added, "I believe that our political leaders should use their position to bring understanding about the religion of Islam and clarify that these misguided murderers have perverted people's views on what Islam really is."



Boxing great Muhammad Ali. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ali's statement Wednesday was directed at "presidential candidates proposing to ban Muslim immigration to the United States."

"They have alienated many from learning about Islam," Ali wrote.

U.S. President Barack Obama, in an address to the nation Sunday, called on Americans to reject discrimination, saying, "Muslim Americans are our friends and our neighbours, our co-workers, our sports heroes." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BACKLASH

Fears of harassment against Muslims across U.S. increase

A severed pig's head was left outside a mosque in Philadelphia. An Islamic centre in Florida was defaced. A Sikh temple in California was vandalized by someone who mistook it for a mosque and left graffiti that included a profane reference to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militant group.

Advocacy groups believe a spate of anti-Muslim incidents across the U.S. in recent weeks can be linked to last week's mass shooting in California and the inflammatory rhetoric of Donald Trump and other Republican presidential candidates. And they say Muslims are fearful the backlash could lead to further harassment and violence.

"I have never seen such fear and apprehension in the Muslim community, even after 9/11," Ibrahim Hooper, lead spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said Wednesday. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INCIDENTS

Problem hard to measure

It's tough to measure the extent of the problem or to know for sure if there has been an increase in anti-Muslim incidents or if people are simply paying closer attention to a small but steady stream of episodes throughout the year. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FACEBOOK

Zuckerberg offers support to those who fear bad reaction

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg is offering words of support for Muslims who fear retaliation for the recent violent attacks by Islamic extremists in Paris and San Bernardino, Calif.

In the wake of those attacks, Zuckerberg wrote on his personal Facebook page Wednesday that he wants to assure Muslims they are welcome on Facebook and that "we will fight to protect your rights and create a peaceful and safe environment for you."

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has proposed barring all Muslims from entering the United States. Other political leaders have condemned Trump's proposal as discriminatory.

Zuckerberg did not refer specifically to any proposal, but the co-founder of the world's biggest social network said, "As a Jew, my parents taught me that we must stand up against attacks on all communities." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks in Columbus, Ohio. He has said he shelved a trip to Israel in order to not pressure President Benjamin Netanyahu. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

Trump postpones journey to Israel

UNITED STATES

Candidate says he'll make trip 'after I become president'

Republican Donald Trump has scrapped a planned trip to Israel, saying he will reschedule "at a later date after I become President of the U.S."

Trump tweeted Thursday that he is postponing the trip, which had become problematic for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Viewed as a Republican Party supporter, Netanyahu's position became risky after Trump called for keeping Muslims from entering the U.S. and making controversial comments to a Jewish group.

Trump told Fox News there were many reasons he decided to hold off on a trip, among them that he didn't want to put Netanyahu in a bind.

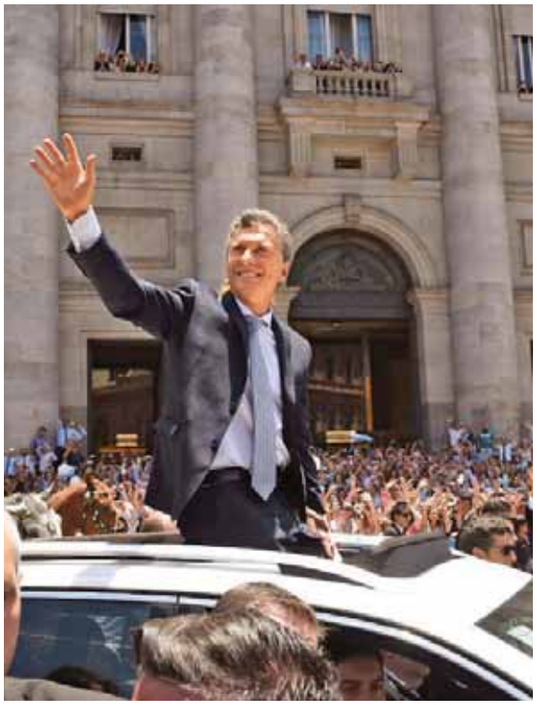
"You know, he said, 'We have a meeting,' and he looks forward to the meeting and all of that," Trump said. "But I didn't want to put him under pressure, No. 1. I also did it because I'm in the midst of a very powerful campaign that's going very well and it was not that easy to do. So I would say lots of different reasons."

Trump has the Republican party in turmoil over his call for a temporary ban on Muslims entering the U.S. following last week's mass shooting by an Islamic militant couple that killed 14 people in San Bernardino, Calif.

> **"I'm in the midst of a very powerful campaign that's going very well.** Donald Trump

Netanyahu's office had said in a statement issued Wednesday he rejects Trump's comments about Muslims but planned to move forward with the meeting with Trump.

The Republican presidential candidate, who has maintained a wide lead in most early polling, sparked criticism among many American Jews last week after speaking to a gathering of Jewish donors. He was booed after refusing to endorse Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel. The U.S., like most of the international community, refuses to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and says the city's status must be resolved in talks between Israel and the Palestinians. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



RIDING HIGH FROM MAYOR TO PRESIDENT Mauricio Macri rides towards the presidential palace after he was sworn as Argentina's new president in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Thursday. Macri, former mayor of Buenos Aires who hails from one of Argentina's richest families, took the oath of office in Congress in front of legislators, Latin American heads of state and other dignitaries, including former Spanish King Juan Carlos I. MARIA EUGENIA CERUTTI/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SYRIA

Insurgents back out of peace talks

A powerful Syrian insurgent faction pulled out of an opposition conference on Thursday in protest over the role given to groups it said are close to the Syrian government, signalling continued divisions among rival factions ahead of proposed peace negotiations with President Bashar Assad's government.

Ahrar al-Sham, a Saudi-backed ultraconservative group that operates mainly in northern Syria, said in a statement that it was withdrawing also because the conference failed to "confirm the Muslim identity of our people."

The group's withdrawal came at the end of the two-day conference in the Saudi Arabian capital, which sought to form a unified opposition ahead of proposed talks to end Syria's conflict.

Two opposition members said participants agreed on a framework to guide the proposed talks. They established a "supreme council" of 32 opposition members and representatives of rebel factions. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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NAIT

Some of the 4,000 dolls seized on a shipment bound for Palestinian stores. AFP PHOTO/HO/HAIFA CUSTOMS AUTHORITIES

Officials seize dolls at Israeli Haifa Port

ISRAEL

Considered incitement of hate: Customs

About 4,000 dolls — wearing traditional Palestinian scarves and holding cloth rocks — were seized last week by Israeli authorities, who say they were destined for the West Bank.

Ram Alfia, of the Israel Tax Authority in Jerusalem, which oversees customs, said the dolls were discovered at the Haifa Port. They were in two containers from the United Arab Emirates that were supposed to be carrying carpets, clothing and plastic products.

The dolls wore light brown pants and white T-shirts. The bottoms of the checkered scarves, known as kaffiyehs, were red, green, white and black, the colours of the Palestinian flag. In one raised arm, each plush toy held a small grey rock.

Two Arabic phrases — roughly translated as "Jerusalem for us" and "Jerusalem, here we come" — were written on the kaffiyehs.

Alfia said it was not immediately known for whom the dolls were intended. The dolls were not declared, Alfia said, but would not have been allowed to continue on their journey regardless because they were considered an incitement of hate.

In a video statement, Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely said the dolls are "being used to poison the minds of the young children in the Palestinian Authority."

In the latest surge of violence this fall, at least 109 Palestinians and 19 Israelis have been killed.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

IN BRIEF

Human smugglers face up to 35 years in prison

Turkey's state-run news agency says prosecutors seek 35-year prison terms for two suspected human-smugglers held responsible for the drowning of Alan Kurdi, the 3-year-old Syrian migrant boy, whose images helped focus the world's attention on the Syrian refugee crisis. Prosecutors accused the two Syrians of negligence and migrant trafficking. Alan, his brother and mother drowned en route to the Greek island of Kos. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

IRAQ

ISIL tactic maroons its own fighters

Besieged ISIL militants in the Iraqi city of Ramadi destroyed a lock on the Euphrates River that served as a bridge as government forces sought to cement their gains around the militant-held city west of Baghdad.

Since Iraq's military launched its push on Ramadi earlier this month, the militants have destroyed all other bridges leading into the city, both on the Euphrates and its tributary, the Warar River.

Iraqi Maj Gen. Ismail al-Mahlawi, the head of military operations in the western Anbar province, said the lock destroyed Thursday was the last remaining bridge from the city centre to the northwest.

The locks' destruction leaves some 300 ISIL fighters trapped in the centre of the city, he added. Col. Steven Warren, the spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition in Baghdad, said the destruction of the bridge may prove to be a tactical mistake for ISIL.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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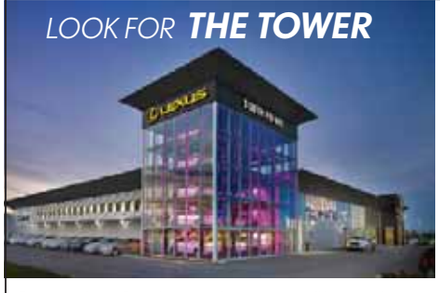

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UNITED STATES

Shelters for immigrant children planned

Federal officials plan to open three shelters in Texas and California to accommodate up to 1,400 unaccompanied immigrant children as the number of people crossing from Mexico into the United States continues to rise.

After a decline in crossings following last year's surge of children entering the United States, border crossings rose again this summer. In October and November, 10,588 unaccompanied children have crossed the U.S.-Mexico border, according to the federal Border Patrol. That's more than double the number for October and November last year.

The increase led the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to expand the number of beds it has for children, the agency said in a statement Thursday. The agency said it was acting "out of an abundance of caution."

The number of families crossing the border also has gone up significantly. Figures released last month for October indicated the number of family members crossing together tripled compared to October 2014, from about 2,100 to more than 6,000.

Two Texas facilities to take in children are the Sabine Creek Ranch in Rockwall County and the Lakeview Camp and Retreat Center in Ellis County. Both are located in rural areas just outside Dallas.

Rockwall County Judge David Sweet, the county's top administrator, said in an interview Thursday his county to take in 300 children, all from Central America.

"It goes without saying that we're very sensitive (to) the plight of unaccompanied children," Sweet said. But, he added, public safety "has to be my No. 1." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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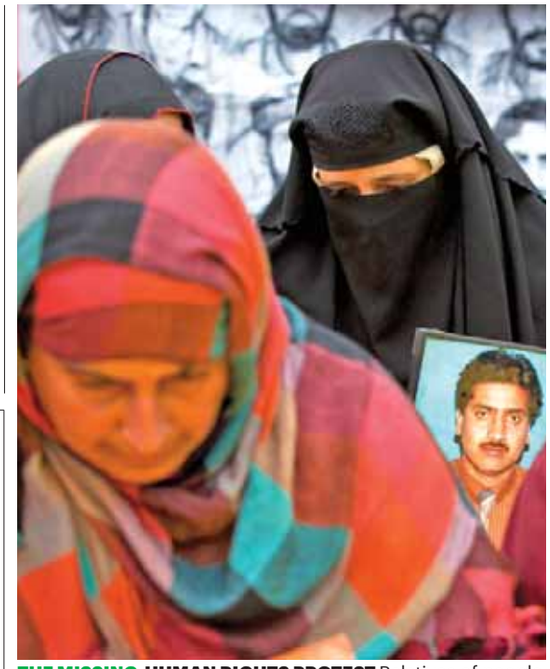

THE MISSING HUMAN RIGHTS PROTEST Relatives of people who have gone missing sit at a protest to mark International Human Rights Day in Srinagar, India, Thursday. According to Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), more than 8,000 are untraceable since the beginning of the Kashmir conflict in 1989, after being arrested by Indian security forces and other security agencies. DAR YASIN/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Blogger begins hunger strike

SAID ARABIA

Canada and family aiming for his release

Saudi blogger Raif Badawi, who was sentenced to receive 1,000 lashes for his liberal writings, has started a hunger strike after being transferred to a remote prison, his wife has announced.

In a post on her Facebook page, Ensaf Haidar said that her husband's hopes of a pardon have been dashed because Shabbat Central Prison, where he was taken Thursday, is reserved for those prisoners who have received a final verdict.

"We are very alarmed at the prison administration decision to transfer my husband to the Shabbat Central and fear it may lead to the resumption of his flogging," wrote Haidar, who lives with the couple's three kids in Sherbrooke, Que.

"We hold the prison administration responsible for any harm that Raif may suffer."

Badawi's supporters have been pushing for a review of his case, buoyed by Quebec's offer of an immigration certificate in June and word from the Saudi supreme court that it was reviewing his case.

Ensaf Haidar, wife of blogger Raif Badawi.
THE CANADIAN PRESS

Last month, Swiss Foreign Minister Yves Rossier announced that negotiations for Badawi's pardon were in the works.

Badawi, the founder of a Saudi liberal blog, was arrested in 2012 and sentenced to 1,000 lashes, 10 years in prison and a fine of more than $325,000 for insulting religious authorities. Badawi received the first 50 lashes on Jan. 9 in Jeddah, but his punishment has since been postponed indefinitely.

A collection of Badawi's writings, 1,000 Lashes, has been published in Quebec and in October, the European Union awarded him the prestigious Sakharov Prize for human rights.
TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Walmart steps into mobile payment war

TECHNOLOGY

Retailer going up against Apple, Google and Samsung

Walmart has begun testing its own mobile payment system that will allow shoppers to pay with any major credit or debit card or its own store gift card at the cash register. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Walmart, the world's largest retailer, said it's launching its own mobile payment system that will allow shoppers to pay with any major credit or debit card or its own store gift card through its existing smartphone app at the cash register.

It started testing the new payment feature Thursday at its stores in the Bentonville, Arkansas area, where the retailer is based. It plans to launch the payment system called Walmart Pay in all 4,500-plus U.S. stores early next year.

It's part of Walmart's overall mobile strategy to making shopping easier and faster, but the launch is the latest salvo in the battle for mobile payments that's in the early stages. Walmart has moved into the field as Apple's one-year-old tap-and-pay system is being expanded to other merchants like Best Buy and KFC, and several months after Google launched the Android Pay mobile wallet app and Samsung came out with Samsung Pay. They're all trying to get a piece of what could be a very lucrative business, but none of them have cracked the market so far.

The move signals that Walmart believes it's best to build its own system. "We are creating a seamless shopping experience that includes payment," Neil Ashe, president and CEO of Walmart's global eCommerce, told reporters. "It's fast. It's simple, and it's a secure way for customers to use their smartphone."

Walmart executives said that after evaluating various mobile options, they found that they had different constraints, working only on certain devices or payment types. Apple Pay requires iPhones. But Google's own tap-and-pay services, Android Pay and Samsung's Samsung Pay require Android phones.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FINANCIAL KNOWLEDGE

Investments spooking millennials: Poll

A new poll suggests that two-thirds of millennials are investing their money, but that most feel they don't have adequate knowledge for the task.

The poll done for CIBC found 67 per cent of Canadians aged 18 to 34 reported having investments including stocks, GICs, bonds and mutual funds.

However, 82 per cent said they didn't know enough about investing.

Meanwhile, the one-third of respondents who said they did not have any investments cited lack of financial knowledge and the fact that investing "intimidates" them as major reasons.

Not having any money to invest and other financial priorities were also cited as reasons for not investing.

Of those who do invest, 41 per cent said they don't get the returns they expect, while 28 per cent found it hard to develop a long-term strategy.

Sarah Widmeyer, head of wealth advisory services at CIBC, says while it's good to see millennials recognize the importance of investing, they need help.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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metro VIEWS
Your essential daily news
Weekend, December 11-13, 2015

DEENA DOUARA KARIM: ON TRUMP'S DANGEROUS WORDS

I'm weary of trying to convince people of things. That Islamophobia is prevalent and experienced by people I love. Or that what's happening today has little to do with religion.

You know how I feel about Donald Trump.

I'm a Muslim and an American, and you know how I feel about Trump.

I sat in the newsroom as he made his comments about banning Muslims from coming into the U.S. Someone referenced Hitler, it was slotted for a news page (in Toronto, a brief) and we all went about our work.

Meanwhile, I stared at the screen. Is it naïve to continue to feel disbelief when every outrageous statement is only incrementally more horrid than the one before?

I'm weary of trying to convince people of things. That Islamophobia is prevalent and experienced by people I love. Or that what's happening today has little to do with religion.

Instead, I'll tell you how it feels to hear Trump — a front-running candidate to lead the world's most powerful country — say he wants a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States." How it feels to hear supporters say "send them all back."

You know how I feel, but I hope you'll still hear me say it.

It feels like anger. Anger at the lies Trump knowingly spews that leave Muslims as casualties in very real ways,

It feels like fear. Not fear I'll be patching crescents onto my coats anytime soon, but I do fear for the soul of the country I grew up in.

Dark times. Donald Trump's message is designed to provoke, but it provokes pain for many who deserve better from America, Deena Douara Karim argues. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

at home and abroad. Anger at the blatantly false information that will shape how Americans — and Canadians, too — view their co-workers and their neighbours. "I watched thousands and thousands of people cheering," he says, of reactions to 9/11 in New Jersey — a claim supported by nothing and no one. Suggestions — a Muslim registry, ID cards — that push the boundaries of what can be thought and vocalized. And anger at the muted response. Calls here and there to remove his name from a building, to be sure. But visceral outrage? For words that so closely parallel Hitler for a population with still-living links? I have to turn to Facebook for that.

It feels like sadness. Like a friend, who was a refugee, hearing "ship them all back" from a Trump supporter. Would they send her family back, whatever the horror "back" represents? "I don't want them here," they say. "They need to go." Sadness because I suspect I have school friends who would now nod their heads, agreeing their families really would be safer this way. With sadness I recall the humour and generosity of Syrians I met years ago – the young hostel owners who shared their food, the man who talked about films as I bought cloth from him. Sad to hear them now compared to "rabid dogs," by another candidate, Ben Carson, and know they would have showered him with the same kindness.

It feels like fear. Not fear I'll be patching crescents onto my coats anytime soon, but I do fear for the soul of the country I grew up in. What are we capable of when Trump calls waterboarding "peanuts"? Fear that people selling "anti-jihad" rifles who distribute Qur'ans for target practice will move into the mainstream, acknowledged and accepted in this "anti-political-correctness" ethos.

It feels like worry. Like hearing friends select baby names based on their sounding not-too-Muslimy. Worry for how refugees — from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq — will be received and what future awaits them when many in the world's wealthiest nation see them as ticking time bombs.

It feels like bafflement. How the very people who accept thousands of casualties from guns will take all measures to brace against a single death by "Muslim." Gun-rights principles above all, but no principles that stand by people like me.

It feels like frustration. Hearing experts agree that inflammatory rhetoric leads to greater isolation and radicalization in dark and vulnerable corners at home, and emboldens groups like ISIL abroad, meaning that Trump and his compatriots help create the world they purport to combat. Frustration because high-profile comments give people permission to express their nastiest inclinations. Frustration with the lack of transparency around mass killings when they are perpetrated by Muslims — who always wind up dead, and who always inspire alternate stories, "conspiracy theories," difficult to ignore.

There is no need to reassure me Trump will not win the presidency, or that a registry system would never pass. It does not matter. Trump is no lone loon — he has support and admiration; has other candidates seething that he's captured the hate vote.

The statements that evoke these feelings are harmful, now. They have repercussions, now. And they change the America that I grew up in, now.

Deena Douara Karim is a journalist and photographer. She tweets at @Deena_Do.

ROSEMARY WESTWOOD

metroview

For a joyful New Year's prediction, just talk to Tomson Highway

Tomson Highway's aura is infectious. His grin. His self-described "spectacular joy."

"I have a mental condition that is worsening as I get older. It's called ridiculousness," he says right after we meet, looking thoroughly pleased. For the next 10 minutes every answer contains a punchline.

"Shall we disrobe?" he asks playfully, taking off his oversized track jacket. He wears square glasses and a black tuque that he pushes up over his ears as we talk.

The acclaimed playwright, novelist and pianist is in Toronto for a cabaret retrospective of his work, Songs In The Key of Cree, on Sunday. Highway, a classically trained pianist, has been writing songs for 14 years, the kind that, at a recent run in Saskatoon, garner standing ovations so great even "People in wheelchairs leaped from their wheelchairs!"

"Language is music," he says — one of his oft-repeated lines, and notes I've been laughing in 4/4 time.

Highway speaks Cree, French and English among others, and travels extensively "for the beautiful people" and the languages.

He's called himself a linguistic activist, and argues each language contains "a secret to the functioning of the human organism." Learning a new tongue offers insight, he says, and that chance to truly listen.

I ask him about Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who won praise this week for his new attitude to indigenous Canadians.

"Yes, he's opening his mind and his heart, and he's listening," says Highway. Compared to Stephen Harper, who had a "heart of ice" and spoke only of the economy, Trudeau is "talking about human issues, issues that matter to humanity. That means there's room for change," he says.

And Highway sees Canada's Aboriginal Peoples on the precipice of great change. He believes pain and trauma are the birthplace of beauty and creativity. From manure, as he puts it, comes vegetation.

"I think we're on the verge of something extraordinary as native people. Collectively as a nation, we have suffered a certain kind of trauma, which brings us to the threshold of extraordinary achievement. That's what I'm here to help with, to help open to the door to extraordinary achievement, and I think it's going to be spectacular."

I tell him that's the best prediction for the new year I've ever heard.

Highway — who speaks far too quickly for note-taking — seems like he could philosophize like this forever, but nothing serious can ward off his humour. He makes a joke about flattery and flatulence as we shake hands goodbye.

"Every moment of every day should be an act of joy," he says. "I dance down the street."

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A whale of a tale... hold the fat

Chris Hemsworth isn't the only actor to change his weight for a role, but the practice can take its toll on the body. HANDOUT

IN THE HEART OF THE SEA

Hemsworth lost 33 pounds to play sailor

Richard Crouse
For Metro Canada

In the Heart of the Sea features less of Chris Hemsworth than we've seen on screen before. He's in virtually every scene, but for much of the film the usually bulked up Thor star is set adrift in a raft, starving and physically much less imposing than usual.

The movie is an old-fashioned whale of a tale. Literally.

Based on the true story said to have inspired Moby Dick, it's about whalers battling not only repeated assaults from the one whale who fought back, but also malnourishment and dehydration.

At sea for three months in tiny whaleboats the men are pushed to the edge of sanity, taking drastic steps to survive.

To convincingly play a starving sailor Hemsworth trimmed 33 pounds off his already toned 6'2 3/4" frame.

"My crazy diet would make you pass out from exhaustion," he said. At certain points he was eating just 500 or 600 calories — that's less than a combo lunch meal at most fast-food places — in the form of a boiled egg, two crackers and a celery stick a day.

Hemsworth and his underfed cast mates passed away the time with conversations "about our favourite foods and what we would eat when we finished the film."

The actor says losing that amount of weight isn't something he'd like to do again, but adds, "by those final sequences when we were supposed to be exhausted and emotional. We were feeling that way off screen too, so it helped."

Dramatic weight loss isn't new — actors have been yo-yo dieting for roles for years — but doctors say rapid body mass reduction can lead to malnutrition, maladies like gallstones and worse. In other words, as Christian Bale who dumped 60 pounds for his role in The Machinist says, "It ain't great for your health."

Still, actors take on dramatic diets to aid in their dramatic work. Anne Hathaway dropped 25 pounds by food deprivation and exercise to make Les Miserables while Matthew McConaughey survived eating only Diet Coke, egg whites and a piece of chicken a day to play AIDS patient Ron Woodroof in Dallas Buyers Club. According to The Playlist he stopped dieting when "people stopped asking if he was all right and started suggesting he seek help."

Just as common are actors who gain weight. Russell Crowe gained 63 pounds to play a CIA bigwig in Body of Lies, George Clooney gained 35 pounds for Syriana and Renee Zellweger gained 30 pounds for Bridget Jones's Diary, lost it, only to regain it for the sequel.

Jared Leto who lost 40 pounds to play Rayon in Dallas Buyer's Club, gained 67 pounds for the film Chapter 27 by drinking melted pints of chocolate Haagen Dazs ice cream mixed with olive oil and soy sauce "to get me bloated even more."

Why do actors alter their bodies? Some call it dedication while cynics suggest it's an easy Oscar. Physical transformations (plus acting talent) brought Robert DeNiro, Charlize Theron and McConaughey to the winner's circle.

But some actors have sworn off manipulating their weight. Jim Carrey turned down a role in the Three Stooges biopic that would have required him to gain 40 to 50 pounds and Tom Hanks blames gaining and losing weight for roles with him developing Type 2 diabetes.

"I've talked to a number of actors who have gained weight for roles and — just out of the sheer physical toll on one's knees and shoulders — no-one wants to do it again," he told the BBC.

MOVIE RATINGS by Richard Crouse

In the Heart of the Sea	★★★
The Danish Girl	★★★
Carol	★★★★
Youth	★★★★

HOW RATING WORKS	
★★★★	SEE IT
★★★	WORTHWHILE
★★	UP TO YOU
★	SKIP IT

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THE TV DINNER JESSICA ALLEN

"I think In the Heart of the Sea is the only book that gave me actual nightmares"

THE MOVIE: In the Heart of the Sea

THE MEAL: Cod au gratin

Director Ron Howard's In the Heart of the Sea is the latest reimagining of the 1820 sinking of the American whaling ship Essex. After a sperm whale attack destroyed their vessel, 20 sailors were shipwrecked at sea thousands of miles off the coast of South America. Only eight men survived, partly on account of cannibalizing those who didn't.

Chris Hemsworth plays Owen Chase, the Essex's first mate who wrote a book in 1821 about the ship's horrifying final voyage. That book provided inspiration for Herman Melville's Moby-Dick in 1851. Meanwhile, Nathaniel Philbrick read both Chase and Melville and published In the Heart of the Sea in 2000, which Howard has now turned into a movie, which you can see starting Friday.

"Don't you remember how terrifying it was?" Simon recently asked of Philbrick's acclaimed bestseller. "I think it's the only book that gave me actual nightmares."

"I read it?"

"We both read it," he reminded me, "in Newfoundland."

That was 10 years ago. I had planned for months to go live by myself in a tiny outport called Grand Bruit, where my dad owned a house. Although I'd never published a single word, I was going to write a novel. A few months before I left Toronto I made another leviathan leap: although we'd only been dating for about eight months, I asked Simon to come with me.

Imagine this: no cars, no roads, a general store, a church, a school, which two 12-year-olds attended, and some 30 permanent residents. We arrived in autumn and stayed through the winter. When we iceskated on the endless network of frozen ponds nestled high up in the tuckamore-covered hills, it felt like we lived in a snow globe. Everywhere we looked — towards the ocean, the mountains, the cheerfully coloured saltbox houses — was picture-perfect. If only Instagram had existed.

And we read. The book that I most associate with Grand Bruit is Moby-Dick. I don't think that's entirely on account of it being the great American novel. It was the time — I was just about to turn 30 — and the place: sitting at night in front of the old Franklin stove with the wind whipping so fiercely outside that it felt like the house — which, coincidentally, reminded me of a ship's hull — would blow down.

We also ate: chow chow and copper pennies, partridgeberry pudding and bakeapple cheesecake, cod tongue, boiled vegetables flavoured with salt pork, salt cod flavoured with salt pork, and, my favourite, cod au gratin.

On Sunday night I pulled out my well-worn copy of What's Cooking in Grand Bruit, a collection of recipes compiled by the United Church women's association. There on page 25 was a cod au gratin recipe: make a roux of butter, flour and milk; add onion; pour over fresh cod fillets; top with bread crumbs and grated Cheddar cheese; bake.

It was so simple to make — and satisfying — that I wondered why I haven't made it more often. Maybe because my cod au gratin will never be as memorable as the fine people who made it for us, and cared for us, all those years ago.

And the novel I was supposed to write? In those six glorious months I wrote 12 pages. But boy, did I live.

Jessica Allen is the digital correspondent on CTV's The Social.

ENTERTAINMENT BRIEFS

Matt Damon to speak at MIT where he once played a janitor

Matt Damon shot to fame in the 1997 movie Good Will Hunting as a gifted janitor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Now, he has been selected to deliver the university's 2016 commencement address.

MIT announced Thursday that the Academy Award-winning actor, filmmaker, social activist and Cambridge native will address graduates on June 3.

Damon said in a statement that it's an honour to be named commencement speaker "at a school that I couldn't have gotten into."

MIT President L. Rafael Reif says Damon has "made us think about our world in new ways, and through his service, he has made it a better place." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Matt Damon
GETTY IMAGES

Michelle Obama and Jay Pharoah of SNL rap a 'go to college' video

America is seeing a new side of Michelle Obama, this time as rap artist.

The first lady and "Saturday Night Live" actor Jay Pharoah rhyme on a new video to encourage students to "go to college" and "fill your head with knowledge."

She also sings a brief solo about her Chicago hometown, with body movements and facial expressions like professional rappers.

The video is part of Mrs. Obama's new Better Make Room campaign to provide teens with the resources they need to pursue higher education.

The campaign is part of a broader initiative by the first lady to encourage students to continue their education after high school.

The comedy website College Humor released the brief video Thursday. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ON COLLEGE HUMOR SITE
The video is part of Mrs. Obama's new Better Make Room campaign to provide teens with the resources they need to pursue higher education.

Chris Hemsworth and Charlotte Riley in the action adventure In the Heart of the Sea. CONTRIBUTED

Inside the heart of Chris Hemsworth

INTERVIEW

Actor talks fame, Thor and working with Ron Howard

Hosting Saturday Night Live earlier this year, Chris Hemsworth exaggerated his swift ascent in Hollywood: "If a jacked Australian with a perfect face can make it, anyone can," he said in a mock American Express ad.

Hemsworth, the 32-year-old Australian actor known the world over as Thor, appears as if perfectly chiseled out of movie star granite. But whatever his considerable natural gifts, Hemsworth has proven an interesting actor inclined to use his powerful screen presence in roles that both exalt it and upend it.

In In the Heart of the Sea, which opens Friday, he reteams with Ron Howard, who directed him in Rush, the 2013 movie that yielded Hemsworth's most confident starring performance as the Formula One driver James Hunt.

In Heart of the Sea, a recounting of the plight of the Essex (the cursed whaling ship that inspired Herman Melville's Moby-Dick), Hemsworth plays the swashbuckling first mate. Shipwrecked by a mammoth sperm whale, Hemsworth's heroic seaman is humbled, left a gaunt survivor.

It's the kind of duality that defines Hemsworth: a hunk but a family man (he has three kids); an Avengers superhero but a talented comic actor. Along with his shirtless cameo in Vacation and playing the receptionist in the upcoming Ghostbusters, he hosts SNL again on Saturday.

In a recent interview, Hemsworth discussed his new film, the box-office disappointment Blackhat and the stresses of being a Norse god.

Do you ever feel any pressure to live up to Thor?
You feel like you've tricked everyone successfully. I never felt big enough playing Thor. And then people talk about you like you're nine-foot tall and 800 pounds. I'm well aware of the illusion. There's not a second where I go: Yeah, I'm a god.

Are you aware there's another Thor in New York right now? It's the nickname of the hard-throwing New York Mets pitcher Noah Syndergaard.
(Laughs) I'll look him up! I think he's far more godlike than me.

The best scene of Thor must have been when Thor tries coffee for the first time, slams it on the floor and demands another.
It's funny, that's probably closer to me than the serious, gladiatorial-type Thor. I'd rather have fun with it. It comes easier. When doing Thor, those scenes where he (lowers voice) spoke like this and everything was grand and big, people thought: That's what he is. Saturday Night Live and Vacation, as well, are good opportunities to go: Actually it's not.

What was your experience on Michael Mann's cyber-crime thriller Blackhat, which some critics defended but which flopped at the box office?
Really hard, actually. I love Michael and it was great. But I do wish I had done more of what I truly wanted to do. I remember being so in awe of him that I said I would just do anything he said, regardless of whether I agreed with it. And that's a real danger because someone hires you because they want to you bring what you're going to bring to the table. I was just so in awe of Michael Mann that I went, "Yep, cool. Wherever you want me." So I don't feel like it was my performance so much. And that wasn't the fault of Michael Mann.

You and Howard, however, seem to be a good team.
I can't speak for him but for me (Rush) was the first time I felt I was truly in an environment where I could just take risks and explore. Something felt sort of pure about that experience. And it was probably the role, too, something I directly related to or liked about that character. Full of insecurity and fear but also cockiness and overconfidence. It was all these contradictory things.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Alicia Vikander was nominated for a Golden Globe award for best actress in a motion picture drama for her role in The Danish Girl. FOCUS FEATURES/THE ASSOCIATED PRESSW

Learning to let go

INTERVIEW

Vikander talks the emotional journey of a historic couple

Matt Prigge
Metro | New York

Before she read the script, Alicia Vikander says she wasn't aware The Danish Girl had a strong second female role. It's the tale of Lili Elbe (played by Eddie Redmayne), one of the first people, in the 1920s, to transition from male to female. That also meant parting ways with Gerda, her wife from when she was Einar, an esteemed painter. The Ex Machina actress takes the other lead, and she says — speaking to us while making the next Bourne movie — the film explores both a transgender pioneer and what her transition did to her relationship with Gerda, who had to find strength to let her go.

You do a lot of period films, from A Royal Affair to Anna Karenina to Testament of Youth. Do you sometimes feel lost going from one era to another?
I get stuck in them. Sometimes I don't know what century I'm in. But it's a great skill to have as an actor, to have sets and costumes already there. It does a lot for you to be able to throw yourself into a new story and immediately get a sense of the world you're in when you get there.

The Danish Girl does bring you back to portraying Scandinavian culture.
It's part of my history and my life growing up. Back during A Royal Affair, I loved being back in the 18th century. I was able to find personal connections to Caroline Mathilde (her character), and it gave me a lot to being someone's voice from such a long time ago.... With The Danish Girl we tried to find historical inspirations, but it was also about meeting people, who had such generosity, in the transgender community, especially people like my character who had been friends or loved ones of people transitioning.

What kinds of things did you learn from people who had been close to people transitioning?
Every single story ends up being extremely different. Sometimes they said it was tough to give them that time. They said they were also transitioning. Like any couple going through a huge change, they both needed to find their feet on the ground in a new location. That's something I could relate to with whatever you're going through as everything's changing around.

I'd argue this is also a great break-up film, and one that isn't about a couple who split bitterly. It's about their struggles to maintain a connection despite parting ways.
Love includes being able to let that person go, the person you love the most. You still have affection for someone, even when things get bad. It was a unique story, but I was amazed by the romantic aspect, and the love between them. Of course they go off on different roads, but they go on the same journey.... They know that and they're still able to reach out and tell the other person they're connected somehow. That's something I felt from page one to the end.

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INTERVIEW

Actor gained insight from transgender community

Matt Prigge
Metro | New York

Eddie Redmayne is up for a Golden Globe for best actor in a drama for his role in The Danish Girl. FOCUS FEATURES VIA AP

Redmayne's re-education

Eddie Redmayne is very aware of how much has changed in the last couple years. Mainstream acceptance of the trans community has been on the rise, and there is now greater demand for trans roles to be played by trans actors, as with Laverne Cox on Orange is the New Black and the cast of Tangerine.

Redmayne, to his credit, took the subject very seriously as soon as he was involved with The Danish Girl, about Lili Elbe, one of the first people to transition from male to female, a number of years ago.

The Oscar-winner talks about how his education meant more to him than just doing a film.

You actually won your Oscar for The Theory of Everything while you were shooting The Danish Girl. That must have been a gear-shift.
We were quite in the thick of shooting. I flew out to Los Angeles with my wife, and it was the most frenzied, adrenaline-fuelled two days of euphoria and excitement. There was so much adrenaline pumping into my body I can barely remember any of it.

The next thing I knew we were back on set, doing a scene where Lily was undergoing surgery. I was lying there on this bed and the whole thing felt like this weird dream. Very odd.

You were involved with this for a few years before it was finally green-lit. It seems like that gave you time to research and get it right.
Until it was green-lit, it was more about learning for my own sake. I'd been attached to it, then it didn't look like it was happening. Then when I was working with Lana Wachowski (on Jupiter Ascending), I mentioned Lili and Gerda (her former wife, played by Alicia Vikander) to her, and she was incredibly passionate about her story and spoke so eloquently about Gerda's paintings of Lili. She pointed me to where I should start educating myself. Then once it got green-lit, I started meeting members of the trans community from different generations. Everyone was so stunningly generous in sharing their experiences in order to educate me. Above and beyond the film, life-wise it was an amazing thing.

What kinds of things in particular did you learn?
I'd always summed that being transgender involved some form of physical transformation, and I realized that's absolutely not the case. It's entirely to do with what's in one's mind. Whether one has undergone any physical changes is neither here nor there. All the women I talked to described how they had known from a very early age that they were a different gender than that which they'd been assigned at birth. What was important for me was that when Lili was living as Einar, she was uncomfortable in this guise.

The Lili of later in the film is very different from when she was first transitioning.
I spoke to one trans woman in Los Angeles who described early in her transition, there was an experimentation of trying makeup. Perhaps she would put too much makeup on or wear clothes that were overly feminine. She made mistakes, almost. She called it "hyper-feminization." She related it to a young girl's puberty or adolescence — of trying things. Looking at Gerda's paintings of Lili, the poses are quite feminine and almost heightened. That was an insight. As she's unpeeling and finding herself, she's almost copying.

Daisy Ridley is not giving away anything

INTERVIEW

Actress talks Star Wars, keeps movie's secrets

Daisy Ridley may not be as brave as her character in Star Wars: The Force Awakens, but she's close.

In her first-ever film role, the 23-year-old British-born actress plays Rey, a pilot and scavenger at the centre of the action in the hugely anticipated Episode VII.

The hardest thing about the job, Ridley said, was overcoming her own fears.

"It's one thing for other people to see potential in you and it's quite another for you to understand that and see it in yourself," she said.

"So of course everyone else being wonderful helps, but there's a certain level of growth... you have to do as a person... It's just like life times a million."

Right now, that life is a sniffley one that includes lots of airplanes and interviews.

The film's nonstop promotional schedule has left Ridley with a cold that has her wrapped in a winter coat on a recent warm Southern California day.

But even illness doesn't weaken her resolve when it comes to keeping the film's hotly guarded secrets.

Though co-star Harrison Ford has said Rey wields a lightsaber in the film, Ridley deflected the question when asked directly.

"Finn and Kylo have a fight with a lightsaber," is all she would say, referring to co-stars John Boyega and Adam Driver, whose tussle has already been shown in the film's trailers.

Daisy Ridley plays Rey in The Force Awakens . HANDOUT

The actress did undergo months of physical training to prepare for her role, a regimen that included weightlifting, climbing and "staff training" — footage shows Rey running and fighting with a staff.

How much different could a lightsaber be?

"I had to look like I could look after myself in the desert and drag and scavenging things across sand," she said.

The youngest of five, Ridley appeared in small roles in medical and crime television dramas in the U.K. before capturing director J.J. Abrams' attention in her audition for The Force Awakens.

> **It's one thing for other people to see potential in you and it's quite another for you to understand that and see it in yourself.**
> Daisy Ridley

The film's set transported Ridley to the Star Wars world, where Abrams and the cast helped allay an initial feeling she describes as "terror."

"Luckily, to have J.J. there, who is so kind and considerate and encouraging, and to have a crew of people who made me feel safe and not rushed and not pressured, that is precisely what took the pressure off."

So did bonding with Boyega. The two would sing songs from The Lion King before shooting their scenes and explored the markets of Abu-Dhabi on their one shared day off.

"We got on so well," Ridley said.

"It was so much fun all the time, and to have him with me through this whole thing, both in filming and afterward, has been incredible."

One thing the actress isn't prepared for is the level of fame she's likely to experience. She tries not to think about it.

"The fame side of things is a weird twist that I'm not kind of interested in," she said.

"If I was going to be recognized for anything, Star Wars is all right." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

STAR WARS

J.J Abrams had his very own Yoda

J.J. Abrams can't really settle on a favourite moment from his saga of directing, co-writing and co-producing Star Wars: The Force Awakens, but this one isn't bad.

"Being here now means we're actually finished with the movie, which is a relief," Abrams said with Jedi calm.

Perched in a small living room setup inside the cavernous Los Angeles Convention Center, this is the final stretch of Abrams' journey to this galaxy far, far away and back again, which started nearly three years ago.

Lucasfilm's creative executive Pablo Hidalgo helped you answer questions about the Star Wars universe during the making of the film. Did you ever stump him?

He was not only unstumpable but he was immediate. I would send him an email at almost any hour asking some arcane question and I'd hit send and I'd hear "ding" and he'd already have responded with an answer. What you realize, by the way, in working on these movies is that even things that are canon, that are beloved and absolute to fans, are very much fluid and in flux. For example, the Millennium Falcon itself, the cockpit changed dramatically from the first to the second movie. It's much bigger in The Empire Strikes Back. Even things that are even the most fundamental and beloved are changing before our eyes and we don't even notice it.

What do you think is the ideal way to watch The Force Awakens?

As someone who really hasn't been the most vocal advocate of 3-D, the strangest thing happened to me on this. When I was watching the reels in 3-D, there were a number of shots — and I know this sounds insane — that I hadn't understood in the three-dimensional space quite the way I did when I saw them in 3-D. I actually felt that there were things that were playing better in 3-D. I had never felt that before. And if people have access to a theatre that has laser projection, it is shockingly better.

Really?

You cannot compare a traditionally projected image with a laser image. The blacks are true blacks. It's almost as if you have to adjust to it.

But definitely theatrical?

The thing that is so fun about Star Wars, and I remember this from when I was a kid, was the communal experience of being with hundreds of people and getting to scream and laugh and cheer and cry with the story. It's got that kind of a pulse and that kind of an engine. Though I love that we all have access to movies on the devices in our pockets and I love that home screens are often better than theatre 17 at the multiplex, I also feel like movies speak to a human desire, if not need, to congregate and to experience stories communally.

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> **I was most surprised that the studio never said no. That's incredible to me.**
> Director J.J. Abrams

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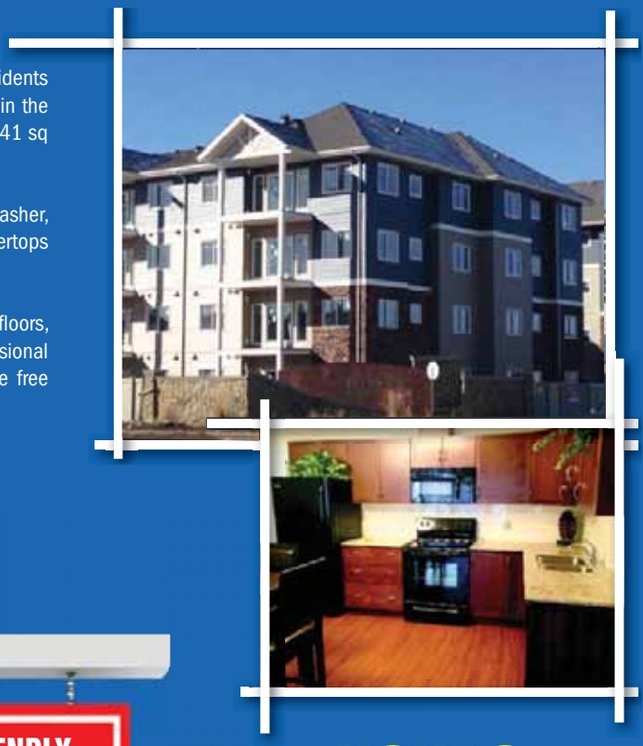

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PEOPLE PLACES THINGS

Kiwi actor departs from his usual roles in new film

Steve Gow
For Metro Canada

Jemaine Clement is perhaps Hollywood's least likely leading man — if only because he doesn't really want to be one.

"I've had a couple of things that were more dramatic or more a leading role (but) I wasn't interested in doing a leading role," explained the Kiwi comic-actor over the line from New Zealand.

"I think I just wanted to do other kinds of things like writing and doing music."

One half of the popular Flight of the Conchords, Clement has been active since the comedy duo's HBO series final episode aired in 2009 but mostly working in the shadows as a supporting player in movies like Dinner With Schmucks or Muppets Most Wanted.

With this Friday's VOD release of the dramedy People Places Things however, Clement took on the rare role as leading man because "this time the idea didn't bother me; it didn't intimidate me like it once did."

In the film, Clement plays a graphic novelist flailing emotionally after he catches the mother of his twin girls having an affair with a mutual pal.

Forced into single fatherhood, he must juggle the minefield of being a dad and dating in Manhattan.

"Usually if someone is failing as a father, they're (less) in the story and you may not see that they have good intentions — you may not see that they're trying," said Clement, of his pull to the part that's drawn praise for its delicate balance of humour and hardship.

"Like real life, it's not all jokes and it's not all sad — it's somewhere in between."

Although Clement has been lauded for this compassionate leading man, he insists his aspirations lie in remaining a supporting actor.

Jemaine Clement, with Aundrea Gadsby and Gia Gadsby, in People Places Things. HANDOUT

In fact, he has even begun talking with his former partner Bret McKenzie about reuniting Flight of the Conchords — although a return to television is rather unlikely.

"It was like making a sitcom and recording an album in the time that you'd usually do one of those things. Either one of those things is hard enough," reminisced Clement.

"I enjoyed that (but) it's just that in the whole TV series, it was a lot to do."

FAVOURITES

Jemaine Clement's favourite person, place and thing:

Favourite person
"Probably my son," admitted the comedian. "Usually I would answer my mum so it's between them — they have to fight it out."

Favourite place
"The Coromandel in New Zealand is really beautiful," said Clement of the country's popular holiday destination. "But New York is my favourite city so that will just have a battle too."

Favourite thing
"That's easy, my guitar," laughed Clement, who is planning on reuniting with his musical partner for Flight of the Conchords. "We have been hanging out and doing a little writing. It's not intensive yet (but) in a few months we'll be back into it."

"There has to be another Michael Jackson out there. There has to be another Supremes," says Kelly Rowland.
JOHN BAZEMORE/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kelly Rowland is busy chasing her own destiny

INTERVIEW

Singer looks for the next girl-group superstars

If fans are anticipating a Destiny's Child reunion album, Kelly Rowland says don't expect one anytime soon.

These days, Rowland is focused on recording solo music and filming a documentary series called Chasing Destiny, which premieres on BET in April. She completed a three-city quest in New York, Atlanta and Los Angeles with veteran choreographer Frank Gatson — who serves as Beyonce and Rowland's creative director — auditioning talent in hopes of finding the next superstar girl group.

"I don't care where they are, where they live, where they're from, their background — I just want to make sure that I have girls in the group who are not afraid to work, who are excited about a great opportunity, who have goals and think, and breathe, and sleep music," Rowland said in an interview last week.

The Grammy winner said she wants to create a girl group for this generation of music fans. The pop charts currently include Fifth Harmony, who had a major hit this year with Worth It, and British group Little Mix, who won The X Factor in 2011 and released their third album last month.

But Rowland believes there's room for more.

"When Destiny's Child was around I remember there was Xscape, there was SWV, there was En Vogue, there was the Cheetah Girls," she said.

"There were all these different types of groups, and these different types of girls groups, and there's just one (now) — you're kidding me? Like, get out of here. It should definitely be more."

> **When Destiny's Child was around I remember there was Xscape, there was SWV, there was En Vogue, there was the Cheetah Girls.**
> Kelly Rowland, on today's dearth of girl groups

Rowland said she and Gatson aren't sure how many girls will be selected for the group. Gatson said he already held two secret audition sessions in New Orleans and New York without Rowland, in hopes of finding more candidates. More than 70 prospects auditioned for them in each city.

"We have to search under every rock," said Gaston, who groomed Destiny's Child and also choreographed routines for Michael Jackson and Jennifer Lopez. "There has to be another Michael Jackson out there. There has to be another Supremes."

Until they find their group, Rowland said she's enjoying the process as she reminisces about her time with Destiny's Child. The group was one of the bestselling female groups of all-time, releasing platinum-plus albums and multiple hits, from Say My Name to Bootylicious to Survivor.

Rowland said her "heart beats so fast" thinking about those times with Beyonce and Michelle Williams.

"It takes me back to those days when we were grinding and being moulded," said Rowland, who will release a solo album next year.

"I think this is the most beautiful moment. The fun part is getting to know these girls (and) being able to share my stories."
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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"He's not selling real estate now. He's the same guy," says Harrison Ford of a 30-years-older Han Solo. HANDOUT

30 years later, same Solo

STAR WARS

Ford on reprising his role as rebel of the cosmos

When speaking about Star Wars, there are few topics that inspire a twinkle in Harrison Ford's eyes. The 73-year-old actor is matter-of-fact about almost everything — from his reunion with Carrie Fisher ("It was no big deal") to the franchise's unwavering popularity ("For me, it's old news").

However, when Ford brings up his new co-stars, he lights up like the Millennium Falcon charging through hyperspace.

"The new, young actors Daisy Ridley and John Boyega were well cast, well directed and are huge talents," he said, his voice lifting, during a recent interview. "They carry the movie."

After more than 30 years, Ford is reprising his role as smart-aleck smuggler Han Solo in director J.J. Abrams' Star Wars: The Force Awakens. The iconic character, who hasn't been seen on screen since celebrating the fall of the Galactic Empire in 1983's Return of the Jedi, serves as an unlikely mentor to scavenger Rey (Ridley), defector Finn (Boyega) and pilot Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac) as they team up to take on masked adversary Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) and his minions.

While the film has been cloaked in an unparalleled level of secrecy, Ford guaranteed that fans can expect the same Solo they fell in love with from the original Star Wars trilogy.

Ford, who infamously wanted George Lucas to kill off Solo in Return of the Jedi, had a "why not?" attitude about suiting back up. He wasn't surprised by Disney's Death Star-sized plan to revive the franchise after acquiring Lucasfilm in 2012 for more than $4 billion. The studio is planning to release a stand-alone film about a young Solo in 2018.

"If you make a huge investment in a product and it pays off, there's wisdom in seeing whether the well has run dry," Ford said. "If the well has run dry, (expletive) admit it and go on to something else. This well has not dried, especially when you introduce new discoveries, which Daisy Ridley, John Boyega, Oscar Isaac and Adam Driver represent."

> **If you make a huge investment in a product and it pays off, there's wisdom in seeing whether the well has run dry.... This well has not dried.**
>
> Harrison Ford on the Star Wars franchise

Despite embodying the intergalactic scoundrel in three films, the Indiana Jones star didn't feel the need to provide Force Awakens filmmakers with much insight into Solo, who is back alongside shaggy sidekick Chewbacca (Peter Mayhew).

"They wanted to know if I didn't like something, and we would talk about ways to fix it," Ford said. "That's what we do. It's a collaborative process. There wasn't much. (Lawrence) Kasdan was back. He was one of the writers from the original films. He has a keen understanding on how the beast works, so I think they produced a script that — in my mind — was very easy to work with."

Once he was back in a galaxy far, far away, Ford's reprisal was stopped short on the second day of production last year when a door on the Millennium Falcon set outside London fell on him. He broke his left leg and was grounded for months. The unexpected time off proved more frustrating than fruitful.

"I had been ready," he said. "I didn't have much to think about. I think it gave J.J. some more time to think about some of the scenes."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DRAMA

In The Heart of the Sea

Director: Ron Howard
Starring: Chris Hemsworth, Benjamin Walker

In the winter of 1820, the New England whaling ship Essex was assaulted by something no one could believe: a whale of mammoth size and will. The real-life disaster would inspire Herman Melville's Moby-Dick.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 60% Audience: 70%

DRAMA/COMEDY

The Forbidden Room

Director: Tom Hooper
Starring: Roy Dupuis, Clara Furey

A submarine crew, a feared pack of forest bandits, a famous surgeon, and a battalion of child soldiers all get more than they bargained for as they wend their way toward progressive ideas on life and love.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 95% Audience: 73%

HORROR

A Christmas Horror Story

Director: Grant Harvey, Steven Hoban, Brett Sullivan
Starring: William Shatner, George Buza

It's the season of joy, peace, and goodwill... unless you live in Bailey Downs. Last Christmas Eve, two teens came to a grisly end in a school basement. Now, one year later, a new set of horrors has come to town.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 75% Audience: 94%

DRAMA

Brooklyn

Director: John Crowley
Starring: Saoirse Ronan, Domhnall Gleeson

Eilis Lacey is a young Irish immigrant navigating her way through 1950s Brooklyn. Lured by the promise of America, Eilis departs Ireland and the comfort of her mother's home for the shores of New York City. Homesickness quickly diminishes as a fresh romance sweeps up Eilis.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 98% Audience: 97%

5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE GOLDEN GLOBES

1 Oops!

The Golden Globes' official Twitter account was drawing flak even before the nominees were announced after mistaking presenter America Ferrera for Gina Rodriguez.

In a series of tweets, which have since been amended, the Globes linked to Rodriguez's twitter account (@HereIsGina) instead of Ferrera's (@AmericaFerrera).

Luckily, attentive social media users did what they do best and captured the offending tweets — while throwing in some snarky responses for good measure.

2 Canada's sole nominee

Irish-Canadian author Emma Donoghue was the only Canuck to pick up a nomination this year. Donoghue, who is based in London, Ont., got the nod for the adaptation of her novel, Room. The book tells the story of a young boy and his mother who are held captive in a shed. The film won the People's Choice Award at the Toronto International Film Festival earlier this year and has been generating major Oscar buzz. Directed by Lenny Abrahamson, the movie also picked up Golden Globe nominations for best film drama and best film actress in a drama for Bree Larson, who plays the child's mother.

3 Must-sees before 2015 ends

Several big-screen nominees are not even being released until Christmas. Leonardo DiCaprio is nominated for The Revenant, a film about a 19th century frontiersman that is also in the running for best motion picture - drama, best director and best original score. Will Smith is nominated for Concussion, which tells the story of the doctor who discovers the prevalence of brain damage in professional football players.

4 No surprises here

It's no surprise that Julia Louis-Dreyfus picked up another nomination for her starring role in HBO series, Veep. It's Louis-Dreyfus's fourth nomination for the comedy, and the seventh in her career. Box office hit The Martian received three nominations: best picture comedy, best director (Ridley Scott) and best actor (Matt Damon). Released in October, the two-hour-plus sci-fi comedy has already grossed more than $221 million in the U.S.

5 The omissions

Kevin Spacey, who took home the Golden Globe for best actor in a TV drama last year for House of Cards, was shut out this time around. Mad Men only got one nomination for its final season — Jon Hamm is up for best actor in a TV drama series.

And despite generating Oscar buzz and picking up Golden Globe nominations for best picture, best screenplay and best director, the ensemble cast for Boston Globe investigation drama Spotlight came up empty. Mark Ruffalo was nominated for another film, Infinitely Polar Bear, in which he plays a man with bipolar disorder.

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Serial season two is here

PODCASTS

Taliban prisoner's story to be a TV show

The widely popular podcast Serial has arrived.

In the highly-anticipated second season, NPR producer Sarah Koenig tells the story of Bowe Bergdahl, a U.S. soldier who was taken prisoner by the Taliban after disappearing from a base in Afghanistan in 2009.

After five years in captivity, Bergdahl was released in a prisoner exchange and U.S. President Barack Obama announced that he was on his way home.

But, as Koenig explains, while Bergdahl's release was initially celebrated, "public reaction to his return flipped."

Soldiers from his unit called him a deserter and the U.S. army launched an investigation into how he was taken prisoner.

"Through all of this, Bergdahl has been quiet. He hasn't spoken to the press or done any interviews on TV. He's been like a ghost at the centre of a raucous

Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, the focus of Serial's second season, was held prisoner for years by the Taliban. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

fight," Serial explains.

In the first episode — called "DUSTWUN," the military acronym for "duty status — whereabouts unknown," which is available online — listeners hear Bergdahl's voice, from about 25 hours of taped phone conversations with filmmaker Mark Boal.

"There I was in the open desert and I'm not about to outrun a bunch of motorcycles," Bergdahl tells Boal near the end of the episode about how he was taken. "I couldn't do anything against six or seven guys with AK47s. They pulled up, and that was it."

Boal, who wrote and produced Zero Dark Thirty and The Hurt Locker, is Koenig's production partner for season two.

"This one idiosyncratic guy makes a radical decision at the age of 23, to walk away into Afghanistan, and the consequences of that decision, they spin out, wider and wider. And at every turn you're surprised, the picture changes," Koenig says in the first episode about Bergdahl's story.

"To get the full picture, you need to go very, very small, into one person's life — and also very, very big, into the war in Afghanistan."

People quickly took to social media to celebrate the podcast's return.

"More intriguing than I expected w. bergdahl's story," wrote Twitter user Lauren Woods, "guessing it will get even better."

"Raise your hand if all you really care about is listening to the first episode of season 2 of @serial," added Claire Cole.

And some were already hooked. "Just listened to Serial season 2. Pretty much got me engrossed. I'm into this story," wrote Amy Hoag.

Season two — which will be told over eight to 10 episodes, Koenig told the New York Times — is being developed into a TV show. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

TV PERSONALITIES

Nardwuar recovers in hospital from stroke

Offbeat celebrity interviewer Nardwuar the Human Serviette is recovering from a stroke in Vancouver.

The humorous TV personality and musician, whose real name is John Ruskin, has the news posted on his Twitter account.

The posting issued Wednesday night says the 47-year-old YouTube star suffered the stroke at a party in Vancouver.

It also says he's recovering at Vancouver General Hospital.

The nasally voiced Vancouver native is known for his eccentric approach to interviews, which he conducts in a tartan tam cap.

His interview subjects have ranged from Snoop Dogg, Chuck D, Iggy Pop and Katy Perry to Rush's Geddy Lee and former U.S. president Gerald Ford. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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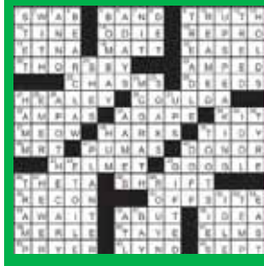

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Spirit of the West's time for a rest

HOME FOR A REST

Last call for band behind classic pub-crawl song

Alan Cross
For Metro Canada

You'll have to excuse me, I'm not at my best/ I've been gone for a week, I've been drunk since I left

If someone has written a better drinking song than Spirit of the West's Home for a Rest, I haven't heard it. While in the U.K., frontman John Mann and guitarist Geoffrey Kelly documented a rather intense crawl of pubs and other establishments over the course of a week.

You'll have to excuse me, I'm not at my best
I've been gone for a week, I've been drunk since I left
These so-called vacations will soon be my death
I'm so sick from the drink, I need home for a rest.

The song originally appeared on Spirit of the West's 1990 album, Save This House, and has since become the classic Canadian drinking song. Most musicians only dream of writing a song that spans generations. I'm pretty sire an ability to recite the lyrics is part of the citizenship test.

Things have not been going well for John over the last decade. In 2009, he was diagnosed with colorectal cancer but was able to overcome it. By 2011, he was cancer-free.

But then he noticed that he was having more trouble remembering things. He'd been experiencing minor lapses as far back as 2001 but they seemed to be getting worse. Song lyrics were forgotten. Familiar guitar chord changes were lost. The memory issues got worse during his cancer treatments but his doctors thought they'd go away once the cancer was eradicated.

They didn't. In fact, they got worse.

In September 2014, John and his wife, playwright Jill Daum, decided to go public with John's condition. Barely into his 50s, he was diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's, an incurable degeneration of cognitive functions. With the time John has left, he and Jill want to do what they can about raising awareness of a disease that's going to become more prevalent as the population ages.

John can still perform, but he needs help. Lyrics are on an iPad. He has someone with him to guide him through the performance. But Spirit of the West recognizes that the time has come to bring the band's career to a gracious close. A couple of farewell shows have been set for the Commodore Ballroom in Vancouver on April 15 and 16.

THERAPY

How you can help

Meanwhile, John and Jill are not giving up. Having exhausted every possible treatment, they are now turning to experimental and very expensive stem cell therapy. One course of treatment can cost up to $50,000. If you're interested in helping out, you can donate at Generosity.com.

For more, go to AJournalofMusicalThings.com or follow me on twitter at @alancross.

BOOK BRIEF

Big shake of a lamb's tale

This is the story of how an injured lamb named Sweet Pea started a war. Well, a bidding war. John and Jennifer Churchman's lamb hurt a leg on the Vermont farm where they keep sheep, ducks and geese.

To celebrate Sweet Pea's recovery, the couple dressed up their animals, fed them delicacies like pumpkin slices and shared photos online. The images formed the illustrations for Sweet Pea & Friends: The SheepOver, a children's book they initially self-published.

Within days of a blog post about Sweet Pea by a local bookstore owner, the Churchmans had a literary agent. A bidding war for the story among five major publishing houses followed.

The story of Sweet Pea, published by Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, is in stores in time for Christmas. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Sweet Pea book in a store. AP

SPONSORED CONTENT

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Anita, a young Nepalese mother, can tell you how devastating it is to watch your three-year-old son's face fade away. She can tell you how hard it is to miss the special moments in your child's life as you slowly lose your sight.

This holiday season consider what it might be like to lose your sight, to miss watching the children in your life light up from joy.

For women and girls like Anita living in developing countries, losing sight means losing everything.

Two out of three of the world's blind are women. Ninety per cent live in the developing world. Beyond a lack of access to care and financial resources, women's needs are often not prioritized by male-headed households. Yet without vision, they cannot work or live independently and become more vulnerable to poverty, ill-treatment and abuse.

Anita knows this all too well. As her vision worsened, her husband started treating her poorly and she was forced to live with relatives; she could no longer care for herself or her son. The greatest tragedy of Anita's story is that her vision loss was simply due to cataracts — an easily solvable problem that costs only $50 to fix.

Anita visited a hospital but couldn't afford the surgery. Thankfully, because of Seva Canada donors, Anita's costs were covered. With her vision restored, Anita plans to become a tailor, open her own business, and take care of her son. Anita's life has changed profoundly.

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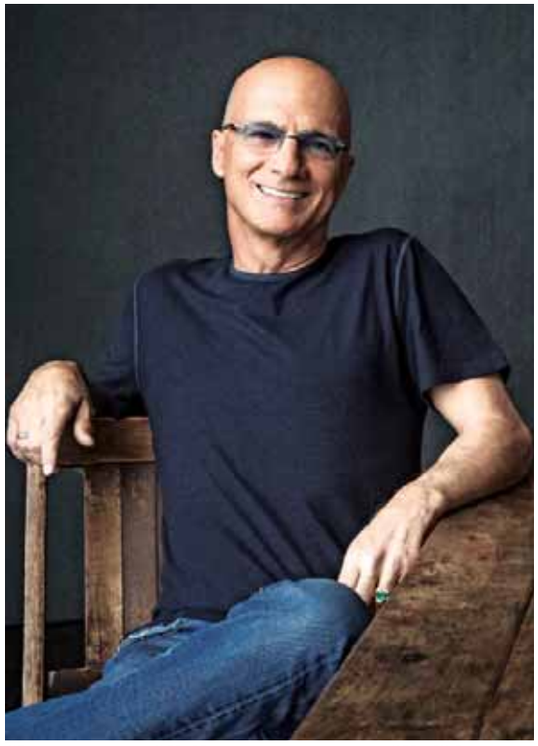
Jimmy Iovine: A year at Apple Music

INTERVIEW

Executive talks DJs, Drake, human-curated content



"Are we there yet? No! Is it a work in progress? Yes!" Apple Music's Jimmy Iovine says of the company. CONTRIBUTED

When Apple Music elbowed their way into the streaming market, they were late to the party: Songza had consciously coupled with Google Play, Spotify's catalogue granted every musical wish (that wasn't Taylor Swift) for free, and Tidal had an 18-artist supertrust of owners, including but not limited to Jay Z, Beyoncé, Kanye West, and Daft Punk.

But like the guest that everyone was waiting for, all eyes turned to Apple Music when it arrived fashionably late last June, shepherded by Jimmy Iovine.

"We've only been open five months," Iovine, 62, says over the phone. "That's a short time. When you're at Apple it's not a short time because all eyes are on you from the minute you think about hatching."

As Apple drops its Best Of list, Iovine looks back on Apple Music's first year.

March: Get Lowe

Iovine made it an early priority to poach beloved BBC DJ Zane Lowe. "We went out and got who we felt was the best guy in the world for discovering new artists," says Iovine. Lowe's show on Beats 1 radio has had such exclusives as an hour-long interview with Adele and first cracks at tracks by artists such as Coldplay and Skrillex.

June: What A Time To Be Alive

When Apple Music launched, they only needed two superstars: Torontonians Drake and The Weeknd, who performed I Can't Feel My Face for the first time at the launch. Drake has since peppered the service with exclusives, such as his dad jivin' Hotline Bling video and his team's OVOSOUND Radio show. "He's a very progressive artist as far as technology is concerned," Iovine says.

July: Press Playlist

A crusader for human-curated content, Iovine personally listened to thousands of playlists, from Trap Soul to Cleaning Up After The Kids, that had been developed by hundreds of Apple employees. He has a tip for aspiring New Year's Eve playlist makers. "The whole thing about playlists is what song comes next," he says.

November: You Had A Bad Day

On November 19, Iovine clumsily tried to underline Apple Music's usability on CBS This Morning by saying, "I've always known that women find it very difficult at times, some women, to find music."

The backlash online was immediate.

December: Beats 2.0?

For all the service's success, Iovine is not done yet. "Like anything you're creating, I'm thrilled with some stuff, not so thrilled with other stuff," he says. "I like where we are with our audience reach, I like where we are with our subscriber base so far, I like where we are musically."

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Top 3 Songs on iTunes in 2015

1 Uptown Funk, Mark Ronson (feat. Bruno Mars)
This throwback jam was the biggest hit of 2015.

2 See You Again, Wiz Khalifa (feat. Charlie Puth)
The hip-hop tribute scored the touching climax to Furious 7.

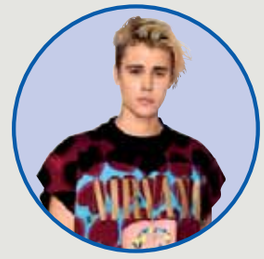
3 Thinking Out Loud, Ed Sheeran
Sheeran's guitar ballad bloomed during wedding season.

Top Albums on iTunes in the last year

1 25, Adele
The British ballad belter's record beat every other album released in 2015.

2 If You're Reading This It's Too Late, Drake
What release strategy? Drake's mix tapes didn't need marketing.

3 Purpose (Deluxe), Justin Bieber
Bieber joins the Canadian invasion of the albums' chart.



metro TRAVEL

Your essential daily news

Kathy Griffin says her first-ever Carnival Cruise Lines comedy routines will rock the boat

Embracing America and Cuba

Lance McMillan
For Metro Canada

Dec. 17 will mark one year since U.S. President Barack Obama ordered the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba.

As it stands now, restrictions imposed by the embargo have only been eased through executive action and pertain mainly to travel and telecommunication. But change, albeit small, can be readily seen.

Walking down the streets of Havana, it is not unusual to see locals wearing clothing adorned with the American flag. Even taxis with American flags hanging in the window or dangling from rearview mirrors have become commonplace.

The island nation cannot yet fully embrace any real change, however, as it is up to Congress to lift the embargo that went into effect back in 1961. While the previous 113th Congress may have been one of the most unproductive congresses in U.S. history, the current 114th Congress seems to be on a better track.

So if you're planning on escaping the cold Canadian winter, Cuba should be on the top of your list as it may be the last chance to see it in its current state.

ALL PHOTOS BY LANCE MCMILLAN

TRAVEL NOTES BALI BARGAIN, FANCY LUGGAGE

Lombok is just one island east of Bali. CONTRIBUTED

Indonesia deal
Save up to $540 on Contiki's new eight-day Bali Island hopper trip when you book and pay before Dec. 23. With a shortie trip, you only have to take five days off work to hang out on Bali, Gili Trawangan and Lombok, one of the world's top hot spots.

Besides island hopping, you'll be snorkelling and surfing, staying in four-star hotels and enjoying amazing Indonesian cuisine. Visit Contiki.com.

The new Quartermaster Homme carryon. CONTRIBUTED

Ultimate carry-on
What to get the man who has everything? The perfect suitcase, of course. The new Ebby Rane Quartermaster Homme luxury carry-on keeps him organized, with seven inner pouches that fit together, guiding the packing process so nothing gets forgotten — ties, shoes, tech gear, shaving essentials, etc. A stylish little slice of Italian leather heaven. $1,230, at EbbyRane.com.

The new Iberostar Playa Pilar, Cuba. CONTRIBUTED

New Cuba hotel
Just in time for the influx of American tourists, Iberostar Playa Pilar has opened on Key Guillermo in the Jardines del Rey archipelago, the hotel chain's 11th resort in Cuba. With 480+ rooms, the five-star resort faces the world's second-longest coral reef, and offers a flawless beach, three restaurants, plus a ton of water sports and nautical pursuits to help pass the time. Visit Iberostar.com. DOUG WALLACE

Fly off to the Panhandle this winter

FLORIDA'S HIDDEN GEM

Bohemian hamlet, oyster capital among road trip stops

Steve Gow
For Metro Canada

This time of year, sun-seekers look south to Florida for an easy winter warm-up. But while the Sunshine State is mostly known for its massive family theme parks or Miami's nightlife, there is an overlooked side that's equally as enchanting: the Panhandle. Here's a quick look at the best of the state's northern coastline.

Pensacola

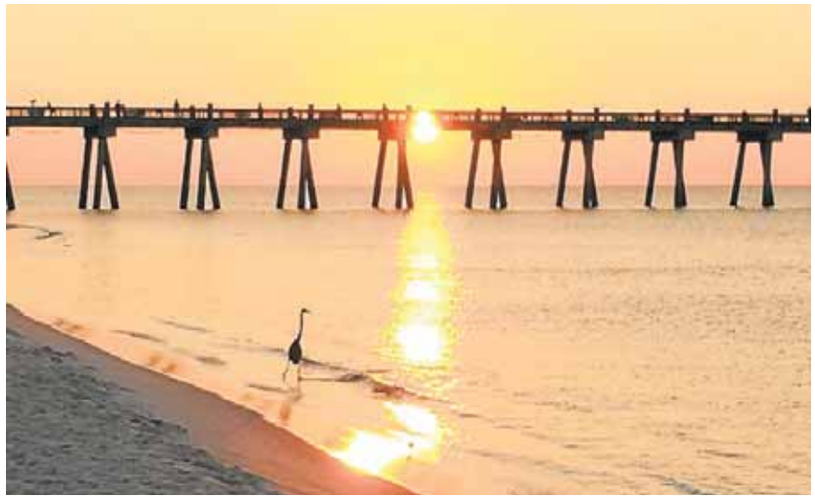
A great starting place, Pensacola delivers the liveliness of a major city alongside an eight-mile stretch of unspoiled beach that's practically deserted this time of year. Relax in the sun or wander around Fort Pickens — a well-preserved Civil War-era garrison located at the beach's western tip that notably included Apache warrior Geronimo among its historic internees.

For airplane buffs, the National Naval Aviation Museum is a world-class gallery complete with more than 150 aircraft, flight simulators and an IMAX theatre. Stay at the Margaritaville Beach Hotel and watch dolphins splash from your balcony as the spectacular sun rises over the Pensacola Pier.

The Emerald Coast

East of Pensacola, this beautiful coastline doesn't just possess pristine beaches but the unique town of Destin (known as the "World's Luckiest Fishing Village") is where anglers can reel in deep-water fish thanks to a nearby 100-foot underwater drop-off.

As you travel further east, don't miss Grayton Beach — a bohemian hamlet with one of the most idyllic beaches in America. While there, grab a drink at The Red Bar, a funky jazz club that's hosted such celebrities as Sheryl Crow within its kitschy art-covered walls. Finish the day at Panama City Beach with its many garish roadside attractions of go-karts and pirate-themed mini-golf.



The Pensacola Pier in front of the Margaritaville Beach Hotel at sunrise. STEVE GOW/FOR METRO

The Forgotten Coast

Before the coastline begins to curl south lies Florida's most seductive secret — the Forgotten Coast. The historic town of Apalachicola bleeds charm with its Victorian architecture and old brick warehouses. Once a main port for the cotton-boom era, Apalachicola is now the oyster capital of Florida, evident by the thousands of shucked shells adorning gardens and walkways. Try fresh mollusks at the popular Owl Café where you can wash the delicacies down with local ale from Oyster City Brewery.

For a real antebellum experience, stay at the Gibson Inn, a 108-year-old mansion wrapped in wide, white porches. For a great day trip, drive 90 minutes north to Wakulla Springs State Park to swim amongst endangered manatees and stop in Sopchoppy en route for a glimpse at the mysterious white squirrels that inexplicably inhabit the area — truly a wonder to behold.

LOCAL EATS

Sno-balls
A popular treat of shaved ice topped with a variety of flavoured syrups and cream is best served near Pensacola at Tommy's Sno-Balls — a beloved roadside shack with hundreds of varieties that include kitschy names like Worm Juice and Alligator Blood.

Grouper sandwich
In Florida's Panhandle, you can't go wrong with any fresh local seafood; however, the grouper sandwich is a Gulf Coast specialty. A meaty, light white fish, the grouper makes for a very flavourful feast whether grilled, fried or blackened.

Tupelo honey
Produced in the Apalachicola region, this rare liquid treasure is a top-grade nectar with the distinction of being the only honey in the world that won't granulate.

Making Disney an even more magical kingdom

ORLANDO

Parks get boost in technology, new offerings

Vawn Himmelsbach
For Metro Canada

If you haven't been to Disney World in a while (or ever), the parks are making big changes — all designed to improve the guest experience.

From "smart" MagicBands to revamped offerings at the newly rebranded Disney Springs — not to mention a cool new Star Wars adventure — there's plenty of magic happening in Orlando, Fla.

And there are special deals for Canadians to help offset the decline of the loonie.

Disney Springs (formerly Downtown Disney) has been undergoing a complete transformation, with the addition of new neighbourhoods slated for completion this summer.

"Most of the change is happening in The Landing, a true retail and dining complex," said Darcy Clark, marketing manager for Disney Springs. "This is all about the dining."

A notable addition is Morimoto Asia, from Japanese master chef Masaharu Morimoto — known for his appearances on Iron Chef America — featuring pan-Asian cuisine such as Peking duck. More restaurants are slated to open in 2016.

Town Center is a brand-new neighbourhood for shoppers, currently under construction. "Our guests tell us when they're on vacation they want to shop — and not just for Mickey sweatshirts and Tinker Bell coffee mugs," said Clark. "They want designer handbags." Town Center will feature more than 60 third-party retailers, including the likes of Zara, Tommy Bahama, UGG and Sprinkles Cupcakes.

Over the past year, Disney has continued to roll out a number of enhancements it announced in 2014, including MagicBands, FastPass+ and a mobile app.

With MyDisneyExperience.com and the accompanying mobile app, guests can plan their trip, make changes on the go, purchase theme park tickets, make dining reservations and view an interactive map (as well as wait times for rides).

While wait times have been an issue in the parks, Disney has responded with FastPass+, allowing guests to reserve access to rides, shows or Disney character greetings either in advance or the day of their visit (wait times can be reduced from well over an hour to five or 10 minutes). Guests can make up to three selections at one park per day: Magic Kingdom, Animal Kingdom, Hollywood Studios and Epcot.

The MagicBand is an RF-enabled wristband that connects guests to the choices they made online. It serves as park admission and access to FastPass+ experiences, as well as a room key and optional payment method within the parks.

And, in the coming months and years, there will be new attractions to experience within the four parks.

This month will see the launch of the new Star Wars Launch Bay exhibit at Hollywood Studios, inspired by the latest film in the franchise, Star Wars: The Force Awakens. A Star Wars land will begin construction in 2016. And in 2017, Disney will launch The World of Avatar in Animal Kingdom with a ride called Na'vi River Journey.

FOR CANUCKS

To address the declining loonie, Disney's Canadian office is offering Canucks a discount on a package for a family of four that includes a five-night stay at a participating hotel with four-day theme park tickets, for travel completed by July 1, 2016. Another option is the Art of Animation Resort, which Disney opened in 2012 as a value-add budget property, ideal for kids with its Nemo-themed pool and Pixel Play arcade.

Animal Kingdom is bringing to life the mythical world of Pandora, inspired by the movie Avatar. CONCEPT ART, WALT DISNEY IMAGINEERING

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TECH IT OUT: GIFTS FOR HER

Recommended buys for that special someone

Resist the predictable.

Instead of buying a spa certificate or mall gift card, why not wow your partner with a hot high-tech toy?

Granted, an activity tracker or touchscreen tablet might cost a little more, but there are some great deals to be had this season. And hey, isn't your significant other worth it?

Ranging in price from $34.99 to $599.99, the following are a few recommendations to suit varying tastes and budgets.

Stream dream

If you're not interested in buying a new TV — but want to turn your existing one into a smarter one — the Roku 3 ($109.99) offers more than 1,700 channels – including all the biggies like Netflix, YouTube, Cineplex Store, Google Play Movies & TV and NHL.

Wet 'n' wild

If you're shopping for a book lover, the Kobo Aura H20 ($179.99) is the world's first waterproof ebook reader. Slip into the tub — or bring this Kobo to the pool or beach while on vacation — and it can remain underwater as deep as three feet for up to 30 minutes. The anti-glare e-ink screen can be read clearly in bright sunlight as well, or take advantage of the integrated light to read while curled up in bed.

No sweat

While Fitbit activity trackers start at just $69.99 for the Fitbit Zip, the Fitbit Charge HR ($149.99) helps you stay informed and motivated while being active. This wearable lets you set a daily goal — such as a certain number of steps taken, distance travelled or calories burned — and the lightweight and water-resistant wristband keeps track of your daily progress.

A touch of class

If budget permits, the Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 (from $449.99 for the 8-inch version) is a touchscreen tablet with a vibrant display — ideal for watching videos, playing games and viewing photos.

Cable girl

Who says charging and syncing your mobile phone or tablet has to be ugly? Belkin's fashion-forward charging cables decorate a purse, bag or keychain, but they're really USB cables to connect an iPhone, iPad or iPod touch to a computer for charging up and syncing to iTunes. Available for $24.99 apiece.

Have a seat

You enjoy taking a load off, so why shouldn't your smartphone? A quirky gift for a music lover is the aptly named Phoniture ($99), a colourful charging station and Bluetooth-speaker set designed to look like an armchair with matching ottoman. Drop your smartphone into the seat and plug your charging cable into the USB port on the back; the chair is then plugged into an AC outlet to juice up your phone.

MARC SALTZMAN

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Grabbing great gadgets for guys

Marc Saltzman

If it's true boys love their toys, then you'll find plenty of gadgety gift ideas to choose from this holiday season.

Whether you're shopping for a significant other, your dad, son or nephew, the latest in consumer electronics can go a long way.

Here's a look at a few suggestions.

Taking control

These amazing Harmony universal remotes from Logitech are super easy to program and use; simply plug the Harmony (from $49.99) into a computer's USB port and download codes from the Internet to the device, then press one of the activity-based commands on the remote, such as "Watch TV" or "Play a Blu-ray." The Harmony does the rest by turning on only the devices you need and switching to the right settings to begin watching. The flagship model, Harmony Elite ($389.99), replaces up to 15 remotes, houses a 2.4-inch touch screen (with support for an optional app), and through its hub (included) can also control other smart home devices.

Through the looking glass

If you're shopping for someone who likes skiing, mountain climbing or cycling, you might opt for one of those trendy POV ("point of view") cameras. The GoPro HERO4 Silver (from $529.99) captures all the action from a first-person perspective, and hands-free, too, when mounted to your helmet, chest or bike (or since it's waterproof, maybe your snowboard or water skis). This version can shoot up to 4K Ultra HD video quality (15 frames per second) along with 12-megapixel photos up to 30 frames per second, and also features built-in and fast Wi-Fi connectivity to wirelessly send the videos and photos to a computer or website. If budget permits, the GoPro HERO4 Black edition ($649.99) shoots 4K video at a smoother 30 frames per second.

Listen up

If you're buying for a music lover, the House of Marley Liberate XL Over-Ear Sound Isolating Bluetooth Headphones ($149.99) block out ambient noise without a cable getting in the way. Simply pair these headphones with your favourite smartwatch, phone, tablet, laptop or music player, and enjoy wireless freedom up to about 65 feet away. Available in black or silver, these headphones are made with FSC-certified wood, stainless steel and exclusive Rewind fabric (made from hemp, recycled plastics and more). Other features include 50mm dynamic moving coil drivers, an in-line microphone to take calls, and controls on the right earcup for power, volume, tracking and more. Battery life lasts up to 12 hours.

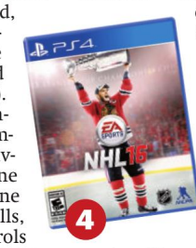
Watch this

What to buy someone who loves his smartphone? How about a wearable accessory for it? Samsung has recently launched its newest wrist-mounted devices, the Gear S2, compatible with most Android devices and available in two versions: the Gear S2 Classic ($429.99) for the fashion-forward guy, or the more minimalist Gear S2 ($399.99) for the sport fanatic on the move. Both offer a circular design, rotating bezel to cycle through apps and an intuitive, personalized interface. Users can stay connected with at-a-glance notifications to check calendar appointments, text, emails and news.

The puck drops here

Face off as or against your favourite team in NHL 16 ($59.99), a fun and frantic hockey game for Xbox One and PlayStation 4.

Compared to last year's version, this new disc or download offers more accessible and responsive skating and shooting controls, a new progression system, sharper visuals and better commentary to get you pumped up while you play. NHL 16 offers multiple game types to choose from, whether you want to play by yourself, against a friend or family member beside you, or online against others.



Squaring off

If you want to drop a hint about your man's absent-mindedness, give the gift of Tile (from $29.99 for one), a small, white and Bluetooth-enabled tracker that helps find lost items via the Tile app for iOS and Android devices. Simply attach, stick or place Tiles on everyday items like house keys, your wallet or a purse, and if you can't find them, open up the app, tap the name of the item (like "John's Keys") and it'll ring loudly — as long as you're within a range of 150 feet. Even if you're farther away, Tile logs its last known location on a map, so you might be able to see if you left your wallet at the office, for example. On the flip side, if you can't find your phone, double-tap your Tile to make your lost phone ring — even if it's on silent — or log into the Tile app or website on another device. Prices are $29.99 for one Tile, $70 for a four pack, $130 for an eight pack or $180 for a 12 pack.

1 Logitech Harmony Elite, $399.99
2 GoPro HERO4 Silver, from $499.99
3 House of Marley, Liberate XL Bluetooth headphones, $199.99
4 NHL 16, $59.99
5 Samsung Gear S2 Classic, $499.99

Prices are subject to change at retailers' discretion.

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Have a green Christmas

1. Poo-Pourri Before-You-Go Toilet Spray ($12.25 - $18.50)
2. Cotton Mesh Produce Bag ($15.50)
3. Anointment Natural Skin Care Wet Shave Kit ($60)
4. Bamboo Towel Set ($45)
5. Magnifeco by Kate Black ($19.95)

ECO-FRIENDLY

Think about the environment and others

Todd Lewys

With the green movement gaining momentum, we thought we'd include a cross-section of novel eco-friendly gift choices for your consideration.

Anointment Natural Skin Care Wet Shave Kit: This gift set includes a handcrafted pottery shaving scuttle, shave brush and old-fashioned, unscented shaving soap. The soap contains moisturizing French green clay, skin-soothing ground sandalwood and flaxseed — plus castor oil for impressively dense foam. $60 at Grassroots Environmental Products at grassrootsstore.com.

Magnifeco: Your Head-To-Toe Guide to Ethical Fashion and Non-Toxic Beauty, by Kate Black: This book by Kate Black is, in just a few words, a head-to-toe guide to ethical fashion and non-toxic beauty. Black examines these subjects, recommends a number of ways for consumers to make better decisions and introduces the brands and designers leading the way along this socially responsible path. $19.95 at Amazon.ca.

Bamboo Sheet Set: Sold by British Columbia eco-retailer All Things Being Eco, these bamboo sheets — available in queen and king size sets — offer a rich lustre, soft feel and, due to their bamboo construction, are very durable. $165-$195 at allthingsbeingeco.ca.

Cotton Mesh Produce Bag: Made right here in Canada, this cotton mesh produce bag is an environmentally responsible — not to mention good looking — alternative to using plastic bags.

You can use it to take your fruits and veggies home from the market, and the breathable mesh allows for easy storage in the fridge. $15.50 at eco-handbags.ca.

Bamboo Towel Set: Softer and more absorbent than cotton, these towels are made of 100 per cent bamboo viscose yarn. Naturally hypo-allergenic, anti-microbial and more odour-resistant than cotton, the set comes with a bath towel, hand towel and face cloth. $45 at allthingsbeingeco.ca.

Bookhou for Mini Mioche Hoodie Tee: The Toronto-based company enlisted local designer Bookhou to design a winning hoodie-tee for children. The result is a 100 per cent organic cotton hoodie tee that comes in 10 sizes and three prints — olive triangle, black bure and eggplant floral. $33 at minimioche.com.

Chemex Coffee Maker: With four sizes to choose from — three, six, eight and 10 cups — this coffee maker is as green as you can find. Made of non-porous borosilicate glass, the carafe doesn't absorb odours or retain harmful chemical residues. It uses patented Chemex bonded filters (US$8.90). US$38.90-$47.50 at chemexcoffeemaker.com or Amazon.ca.

4

VerTerra Palm Leaf Dinnerware: Greenmunch — based in Sherwood Park, Alta. — offers VerTerra Palm Leaf Dinnerware plates made from fallen palm leaves and water. They are microwave safe up to two minutes on high, and are oven-safe at 350 degrees for up to 45 minutes. One hundred per cent compostable, they biodegrade in less than two months. $14-$27 at greenmunch.ca.

5

Weleda Calendula Baby Face Cream: Made with 96 per cent organic ingredients, this cream is free of synthetic fragrances, chemical preservatives and petroleum-derived ingredients. It moisturizes and softens baby's sensitive skin. $23 at minimioche.com, well.ca and other retailers.

Poo-Pourri Before-You-Go Toilet Spray: According to the good folks at All Things Being Eco, this makes a great stocking stuffer. Little wonder — an ounce of perfumed prevention can go a long way in the bathroom. $12.25-$18.50 at allthingsbeingeco.ca.

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Best of maintenance-free bungalow living

It's that time of year again. Time to bundle up — or maybe just hunker down at home with some hot cocoa. In either case, it's a great time to think about lifestyle options that will make for a little less shoveling and a little more relaxation.

A beautifully designed, CHBA award-nominated home (for Best Multi-Family Townhome $350,000-$500,000) couldn't hurt either.

Give yourself more time to experience the important things in life, while still enjoying a sophisticated home you can be proud of — you've earned it. Triumph Bungalows could give you just what you're looking for, offering maintenance-free bungalow living in a convenient South Ambleside community.

As a part of Western Canada's residential development giant Qualico, Triumph builder StreetSide developments has referenced over 60 years of building experience in designing this signature line of sophisticated bungalows. This collection of homes has already seen incredible success with single-family developments in Windermere and Summerwood, Sherwood Park.

"The single-family bungalows are gorgeous and they've proven incredibly livable. However, we've learned that something many of our bungalow clients are looking for is a specifically low-maintenance lifestyle," says sales & marketing manager Barb Lee. "In order to focus their energies elsewhere- family, travel… you can accomplish a lot when you take exterior housework off the list."

It's that keen attention to the wants and needs of mature Albertans that defines this truly "Triumphant" line of bungalows. Triumph has revisited bungalow living, maximizing style and catering to buyers' desires. Luxurious master suites and spacious great rooms anchored by large kitchen islands are hallmarks of the Triumph line. Thoughtful basement development options create functional extra space for family, guests and lifestyle activities. Each Triumph project is architecturally themed with a distinct look and feel to coordinate with the surrounding neighbourhood, but the interior can be customized according to your sensibilities.

"Finishes like granite in the kitchens, wrought iron railings, hardwoods and high ceilings are standard, but the colour selections are up to each owner's preferences," says Lee.

The new maintenance-free Triumph Ambleside concept "is true to the high standards we've set with our single-family Triumph

CONTRIBUTED

Bungalows," says Lee. "The difference here is that all the landscaping, exterior maintenance, snow shoveling — that will all be taken care of for you."

That leaves you to relax amongst the meticulously landscaped grounds of your planned bungalow community.

If you're considering Triumph Bungalow maintenance-free living, then pay a visit to the show home at 7115 Armour Link, South Ambleside, Edmonton.

Opening hours are Monday – Thursday, 3 p.m. – 8 p.m., weekends and holidays 12 p.m. – 5 p.m. Alternately, if you are interested in viewing single-family Triumph Bungalows in Windermere or Sherwood Park, call Claudine at (780) 984-6768. To learn more and view the photo galleries, visit TriumphBungalows.com.

MAKING THE CITY'S NIGHTLIFE SAFER

Local bars, clubs working to improve safety and hospitality

It seems like an unlikely partnership at first, but a growing number of Edmonton's favourite bars, pubs and clubs are working collaboratively with the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (AGLC), the City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Police Service to raise the bar for patron safety and hospitality.

"The public is asking far more of bars than in the past," says Jesse Kupina, operating partner of both The Ranch Roadhouse and Central Social Hall. Both bars are accredited in the AGLC's Best Bar None program.

"It's our job to meet that expectation. It can mean things like better food, cleaner bathrooms, better service, friendly security staff, better training for staff. And above all else is safety. People want to feel comfortable and secure. If a bar fails to live up to that expectation, they move on to the next place," says Kupina.

"Being accredited in Best Bar None allows us to identify as a business that values patron safety – which is a natural extension of better customer service."

The Best Bar None (BBN) program is a partnership between the city's vibrant bar industry and three of the main authorities that oversee these businesses.

In order to participate in the program, Edmonton bars first volunteer for Best Bar None accreditation. Applicants are then given a list of more than 100 industry best practices that improve staff and patron safety.

Bars are assessed to determine if the establishment meets the standard. The successful bars achieve Best Bar None accreditation status to show the public their commitment to patron safety and hospitality.

In its sixth and current year, a record 67 bars achieved Best Bar None accreditation.

Jesse Kupina and The Ranch Roadhouse team pose with their trophy for Best Club at this year's 2015 Best Bar None ceremony. CONTRIBUTED

Bill Robinson, President and Chief Executive Officer for the AGLC, appreciates the willingness of Edmonton's venue operators to step up and take pride in their accreditation. "During the past six years, we're finding industry and partners are making a positive difference to help Edmonton's nightspots be both safe and fun. At the end of the day, we all value one thing in common; we all want safer bars. "

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metro SPORTS

Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool topped their Europa League group after a 0-0 draw with FC Sion while Spurs also topped their group by beating Monaco 4-1

The wait is over ... Aldo and McGregor ready for battle

UFC

No love lost as cocky Irishman insists he'll beat proven champ

Jose Aldo is the only featherweight champion in UFC history. The brilliant Brazilian star is widely considered the pound-for-pound best mixed martial artist in the world. He hasn't lost a fight in 10 years.

And yet in the casinos of Las Vegas, Aldo is a betting underdog in the main event of UFC 194 on Saturday night.

Behold the power of Conor McGregor, the loquacious Irish challenger who has persuaded the world he can end 2015 by dethroning a king.

"He is already beaten," McGregor said. "I look in his eyes, and I see someone who knows his era is over. It's a new era. It's my era. I almost want to comfort him. I want to say, 'Don't worry. It will all be over soon."'

A year of promotional hype and fan anticipation culminates at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in the main event of the biggest show on a huge three-day weekend of UFC fights.

Aldo (25-1) and McGregor (18-2) have traded innumerable insults and menacing glares during the buildup to this injury-delayed showdown. It's finally time to find out whether

UFC featherweight champion Jose Aldo faces off with interim UFC featherweight champion Conor McGregor, right, during the final pre-fight news conference for UFC 194 at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas on Wednesday. LAS VEGAS SUN VIA THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

McGregor can back up some of the most delicious bravado in recent sports history.

"I get in there, and I put on a show," McGregor said. "I come to fight, and this fight will be a performance. I'm not just going to beat Jose. I'm going to embarrass Jose in there. I don't need to gather any more intel, any more research. It's done. He has already lost."

> **He is already beaten. I look in his eyes, and I see someone who knows his era is over. It's a new era. It's my era.**
> Ireland's Conor McGregor on champ Jose Aldo

While McGregor's personality is both magnetic and divisive, Aldo is no wallflower himself, as evidenced by his testy relations with the UFC for the past few years. He has reacted with amusement and anger to McGregor's provocations while adding his own jabs, albeit without the inimitable showmanship of McGregor's rants.

"I'm going to hit him, and he's going to sleep," Aldo said through a translator. "I don't really care how I win. I care about winning. Really the only difference is I always beat Americans, and this time I'm going to beat an Irishman."

Aldo could say little when he was injured in training shortly before he was originally scheduled to meet McGregor in July, scrapping an elaborate promotional campaign and providing more fodder for his challenger. McGregor took on the highly regarded Chad Mendes instead, scoring a second-round stoppage and earning an interim belt.

That honour didn't satisfy McGregor, whose plans for world domination aren't confined to one weight class or even one endeavour ("Hollywood is screaming for me," he said).

McGregor has attracted global attention to the grateful UFC, which has heavily showcased his magnetism and verbosity. He has become a fan favourite — particularly among his countrymen, who filled Vegas' casinos with songs and revelry before and after his victory over Mendes.

"I think it's going to be an electric atmosphere," McGregor said. "I feel the Brazilians will come out to support. They're going to be swallowed by the Irish, though. It's going to be a green Christmas in Las Vegas, that's for sure."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GOLF

Brooke's goals for 2016

Golfer Brooke Henderson had two dreams come true this year: she became a member of the LPGA Tour and won her first tournament at that level.

She's setting her sights even higher in 2016. Henderson hopes to continue her ascent on the top women's professional golf circuit and also lead Canada to the podium when the sport makes its return to the Olympic program next summer in Rio.

"It's an amazing opportunity that I have just to play in the Olympics and to play on the LPGA Tour. They're both dreams that I've had since I was young."

Henderson, a former top-ranked amateur, showed this past season that she was the real deal. Her statement performance came in August at the Cambia Portland Classic, when she blew away the field with a whopping eight-stroke victory.

Henderson was about three weeks shy of her 18th birthday at the time. She was granted immediate LPGA Tour membership by commissioner Mike Whan after the win.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Brooke Henderson GETTY IMAGES

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Vigneault closes in on game 1,000

NHL

Rangers coach says 'sacrifice' vital to success

Alain Vigneault paused for a moment when asked what advice he would give a younger version of himself — one who had yet spend a single game behind an NHL bench as a head coach.

"You sacrifice a lot things on a personal level," he said. "The balance people have in life between their family lives and their work is really tested and put to the limit. I've never felt I worked a day in my life because I love the game. I was willing to make that sacrifice." Vigneault will coach his 1,000th NHL game on Friday when his New York Rangers visit the Edmonton Oilers, a milestone he has reached despite a roller-coaster career.

The Quebec City native was in his late 30s and leading the Montreal Canadiens in the 2000-01 season when he was blindsided by an abrupt firing just over three years into his tenure.

After a brief career as an NHL defenceman, Vigneault got his start coaching in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League and as an assistant with the expansion Ottawa Senators. He knew he would have to take a step backwards to get another crack at the big time after Montreal, so he signed on with the QMJHL's PEI Rocket before the Vancouver Canucks hired him to coach their AHL affiliate. And when then-Canucks general manager Dave Nonis fired Marc Crawford in 2006, Vigneault was the man entrusted with the reigns.

Vigneault — who has a record of 538-349-112 as he prepares to become the 23rd NHL coach to reach 1,000 games — then got hired by the Rangers, but got off to a slow start in New York. Vigneault stayed patient and led the Rangers to a Stanley Cup appearance in 2013-14 before losing out in the Eastern Conference final last season. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Alain Vigneault
THE CANADIAN PRESS

SOCCER

Platini learns fate soon

Michel Platini will find out Friday morning if his 90-day FIFA ban will be temporarily lifted by the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

CAS said Thursday it will publish its ruling at 10 a.m. Swiss time.

Platini asked a CAS panel at a preliminary hearing on Tuesday to be allowed to work.

The UEFA president is currently banned and his FIFA presidential candidacy is on hold. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Michel Platini
SHAUN BOTTERILL/GETTY IMAGES

WORLD JUNIORS

Goalie's suspension creates competition

A mistake by Mackenzie Blackwood has opened up the competition for Canada's No. 1 goaltender at the world junior hockey championship.

Blackwood was Canada's presumptive starter for the upcoming international tournament until he earned an eight-game suspension in the Ontario Hockey League on Tuesday after slashing an opponent in the shoulder. He'll sit the first two games of the world juniors in Helsinki, leaving Mason McDonald to start for Canada against the United States and Denmark.

"I'm just going to take it as it is," said Blackwood on Thursday night after the first practice of Canada's selection camp. "I'm missing the first two games but when I get a chance I'm going to make the most of it and hopefully prove my worth then."

Canada's original plan for the world juniors was to have Blackwood and McDonald as the only goaltenders at selection camp, with Ryan Jankowski, the team's director of player personnel, saying on Dec. 1 that Canada planned to cut down to 22 players with 13 forwards, seven defencemen and the pair of goalies. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Blackwood
GETTY IMAGES

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RECIPE Mini Turkey Meatloaves

PHOTO: MAYA VISNYEI

Ceri Marsh & Laura Keogh
For Metro Canada

These meatloaves are great to make ahead and freeze — then you can pull out as many (or as few) as you need on any given night.

Ready in
Prep time: 60 minutes
Serves 4

Ingredients
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1/3 cup onion, diced fine
- 1/3 cup celery, diced fine
- 1/3 cup carrot, diced fine
- 1 tsp fennel seeds
- 1/2 cup of rolled oats
- 1 1/2 lb of ground turkey
- 1/4 cup ketchup
- 1 egg
- 1/4 cup Parmesan, grated
- 2 Tbsp ketchup
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce

Directions
1. Preheat the oven to 375 F.
2. Warm up olive oil in a pan over medium heat. Add your vegetables and the fennel seeds and allow them to soften, about 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and allow to cool a bit.
3. In a large mixing bowl, place meat, oats, ketchup, sauteed vegetables, cheese and a whisked egg. Mix it all together thoroughly — you want each bite to have a mix of all the elements.
4. Using a 1/3 cup measure, scoon mixture and place each scoop into a cup of a muffin tin. In a small bowl, mix together 2 Tbsp of ketchup and 1 tsp of Worcestershire sauce. Use a small spoon to smear this glaze over the top of your mini meatloaves.
5. Bake for 40 minutes. The internal temperature for meatloaf should be 160 to 165 F.

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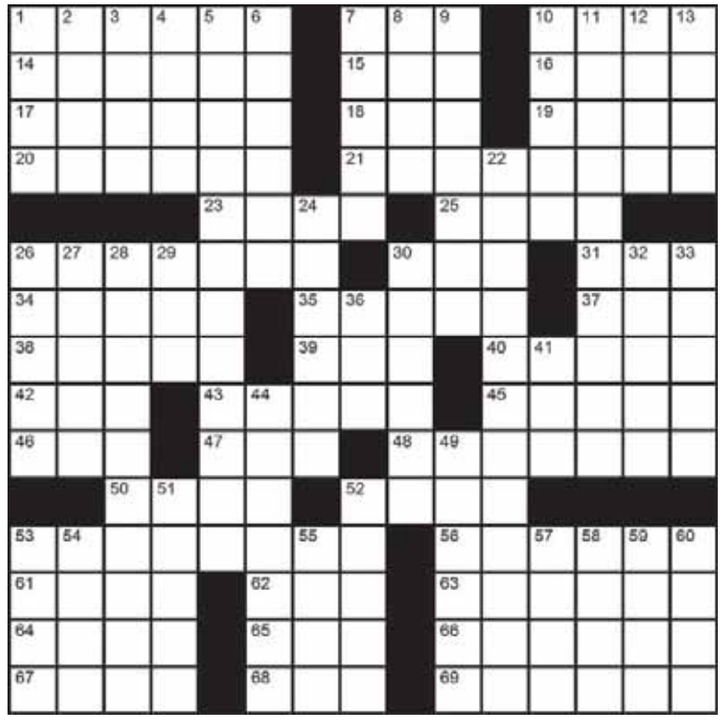
CROSSWORD Canada Across and Down

BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



ACROSS
1. "Sleep that knits up the ravell'd __ of care..." - Macbeth, Act II, Scene 2
7. Joan of __
10. Cried
14. __ __ pants
15. __ polloi
16. Some: 2 wds.
17. Mosaic components
18. Ms. DeGeneres, to pals
19. Single-named rock bassist
20. Bahamas capital
21. Prized-players
23. Alum
25. 'Class' or 'Luck' suffix
26. Javas
30. Ms. Field of movies, to pals
31. Financial deg.
34. Precise
35. Pedestal
37. Western prov.
38. 1970s music
39. Klutz
40. Feigned cry of enthusiasm: 2 wds.
42. Want __ (Newspaper section)
43. Ms. Shriver
45. Some space objects
46. Ms. McEntire, briefly
47. Hill-building insect
48. Archived documents
50. Better Than __ (Rock band)
52. Alberta village southeast of Calgary
53. In a sincere manner
56. "That's groovy with me.": 2 wds.
61. Certain conjunctions
62. Not 'neath
63. Ms. Dion of song
64. Leave in, in proofreading
65. Ms. Lambert of country, to pals
66. Some wading birds
67. __ de combat (Out of action)
68. Impatient shout!
69. Computer clickety-click-clickers

DOWN
1. Rotate
2. Moon goddess
3. Building additions
4. Woeful word
5. From Earth, one would take approximately six to eight months: 3 wds.
6. Make certain/check
7. Up in front
8. Breadbasket bun
9. Irish actor Mr. Murphy of new whale adventure "In the Heart of the Sea" (2015)
10. Drifts through the air
11. "Op.23, No.6, Prelude in _-_ __" by Russian composer/pianist Rachmaninoff
12. Equal
13. Christmas poem opener...
22. Newfoundland: Locale on Fogo Island for those who rarely-stop-over?
24. Classify
26. Aromatic tree
27. Zinc __ (Skin irritation cream)
28. Michael who plays the Scottish lead in "Macbeth" (2015)
29. US broadcasting regulator
30. Journey amongst the lions
32. 1990: Madonna's __ Ambition World Tour
33. Chasm
36. __ Chi (Martial Art)
41. Owl's utterance
44. "__ of a Murder" (1959) starring James Stewart
49. Draw out a response
51. Piquancies
52. Christmastime resin
53. Mixture
54. Not duped: 2 wds.
55. "Star Wars" (1977) role
57. Bit from a movie
58. Van Gogh's Bank of the __ at Auvers
59. Humdinger
60. Fewer

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS by Sally Brompton

Aries March 21 - April 20
Everything should be going well for you now and today's new moon in your fellow Fire sign of Sagittarius will make life even more enjoyable.

Taurus April 21 - May 21
Today's new moon puts emphasis on finances, especially investments and property issues and anything of a monetary nature that involves other people. Lady Luck is smiling on you, so make some profitable moves.

Gemini May 22 - June 21
If you have fallen out with a partner, loved one or friend, or even a work colleague, this is the perfect day to get back on good terms with them. You may have to admit you were wrong but it will be worth it.

Cancer June 22 - July 23
It's unlikely you will be impressed by someone's aggressive attitude. Do not, however, try to confront them. They just got out of the wrong side of bed this morning.

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
Today's new moon urges you not to limit yourself in any way, shape or form. Creatively and professionally you are at the top of your game, so be active, be ambitious and above all be assertive.

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
Get tough with someone. If you don't do it now it will mean an even bigger showdown later on, so let them know where they are going wrong and what they can do to make it right.

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
Cosmic activity in the area of your chart that governs your ability to communicate makes it easy for you to win people over. Use that ability to get others to do the small stuff while you focus on the big picture.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
If you get an offer that could bring you money you should take it. It will mean more work and you will have to sacrifice other things but if you turn it down you will kick yourself later.

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
Look out for your own interests and do something for yourself for a change. Today's new moon in your sign promises great things will happen. You deserve your success.

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
You may be tempted to give up on something today but the planets warn if you stop now you will regret it later in the month. Keep going. You are on the brink of a breakthrough.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
This is a good time for friendships and group activities but don't spread yourself thin. Where your work and creative activities are concerned don't start anything new because what happens tomorrow will require all your attention and energy.

Pisces Feb. 20 - March 20
You may be ambitious but the planets warn you won't be able to reach your goals alone. Look for people who can assist you and ask for help.

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9

5	6			3				
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				5			6	8

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